

Slavcho Trunski



**THE
BULGARIAN
ARMY**

a historical sketch

sofia-press, 1969

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Slavcho Trunski

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The army is the chief means of waging war and is therefore organically linked with it. As a weapon and instrument for the forceful implementation of the foreign and home policy of the class which is in power, the army has emerged simultaneously with the state. In the antagonistic class formations the army was necessary to the ruling classes to oppress the exploited masses and to attain aggressive purposes.

But in order to conceal the true character and role of the army, the bourgeois military theoreticians maintain that it stands outside politics, above the classes and that it belongs to the whole people, fulfilling "national" tasks.

Historical experience has shown, however, that the army's role and character depend entirely upon the nature and purpose of the social system and upon the socio-economic character of its ruling class.

The army of the exploiter capitalist class and its bourgeois state is a weapon for the oppression of the working class and the working people in its own country, for the conquest of foreign territories and the routing of the national-liberation movements in the enslaved and dependent nations.

USA, as an imperialist nation, uses its army for aggressive purposes, interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries, occupying foreign territories and securing the overthrow of governments and regimes it objects to.

The best proof of this in our times is the US intervention in Vietnam, condemned by all honest people in the world, and the dispatch of forces to fight against the freedom-loving Vietnamese people.

An eloquent proof of the character of the armies of the capitalist nations is the fact that most of them are included in various aggressive blocs: NATO, SEATO, SENTO, etc.

The armies of the socialist nations are the exact opposite of the armies of the capitalist nations.

The Soviet army and the armies of the Warsaw Pact countries also have a class character. But they are armies not of the exploiter classes, but of the working people, of the majority of the population (workers, peasants and people's intelligentsia). They defend the great cause of socialism and communism, of the highest, socialist type of democracy.

The Bulgarian army, as an army of a socialist state, is also an army of the proletarian dictatorship. Its role is to protect the gains of the socialist revolution against all internal and external counter-revolutionary forces and to defend the interests of the working people. When the working class took power into its own hands and the bourgeoisie, finding support in the imperialist nations, tried to recapture their dominant position, the army fought against those counter-revolutionary forces and helped the workers and peasants to crush their enemies.

The Bulgarian army was created, developed and strengthened after the pattern of the Soviet army, taking advantage of its experience in military organization and training. This is quite comprehensible, as the Soviet army is the first army in the world which really defends the freedom and socialist gains of the workers and peasants. As the first socialist army, it has the greatest experience in military matters, the training of cadres, educational activity and in the defence of the proletarian country. But the Bulgarian army was not created exactly after the pattern of the Soviet army. The peculiar features of the socialist revolution in Bulgaria, as well as the concrete international

and local situation were also taken into consideration in its formation.

The Bulgarian army was set up under the guidance of the Communist Party, which is the decisive force in our socialist society and which in its activity always proceeds from the premise that the ruling exploiter classes, far from voluntarily relinquishing power, fight tooth and nails to preserve it and, when they lose it, to regain it.

To seize power, the Communist Party must have an armed force of its own. Without such a force, it can neither conquer nor retain power.

1. BIRTH OF THE BULGARIAN ARMY

"A revolutionary army is necessary because it is only by force that the great historical issues can be resolved, and the organization of force in the present-day struggle is the military organization,"¹ wrote Lenin in 1905.

Guided by this Leninist principle, the Bulgarian Communist Party paid particular attention to military matters as an inseparable part of its entire activity to win over the masses and to seize political power, including in military matters not only the military training of individual communists but also their activities aimed at disintegrating the royal bourgeois army and winning over the bulk of its officers and men to the side of the working people. The Party did a good job in disintegrating the bourgeois army even during World War I, exposing it as an imperialist, piratical and unjust war.

In the trenches, during marches and rests, the communists spread the ideas of the Great October Socialist Revolution and called upon the soldiers to turn their weapons against the capitalists and against the king. He and his docile government had plunged Bulgaria into the war, a war in which the people had no stake and which transcended their possibilities. It led them

¹ V. I. Lenin, Works, Vol. 8, p. 575

to utter exhaustion and completely upset economic life. There was not enough food and clothing for the soldiers and the population. In many parts on the front the soldiers went about in rags. Diseases were rampant. All this gave rise to dissatisfaction with the policy of the government. The Great October Revolution in Russia, in which workers and peasants wrested power from the hands of the bourgeoisie, showed to the Bulgarian peasants and workers the road to their emancipation from exploitation and oppression by the capitalists. Soldiers' councils (Soviets) were set up in many units. In unison with the prevailing anti-war sentiments among the soldiers, these councils headed the anti-war movement. Demonstrations and riots broke out both on the front and in the rear. On June 21, 1918, a new coalition government came to power. But the people continued their fight, deeply convinced that Bulgaria's withdrawal from the war could only be achieved by the forceful overthrow of the regime. Such was the example set by the Russian workers and peasants. The idea of an armed uprising now became a cherished and comprehensible idea for the working people: it captured the minds not only of the people but also of the soldiers on the battle-fields.

In mid-September, under the influence of the revolutionary soldiers and officers, the Bulgarian army on the front at Dobro Polé retreated from its positions. They did not want to fight any longer for other people's interests. Through the fault of the monarch and the bourgeoisie, Bulgaria had been brought to the brink of national disaster. On September 22 and 23, the soldiers of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th division set out for Sofia to square accounts with those responsible for all their sufferings and reached the inhabited places of Pehchevo, Tsarevo Selo and Berovo. The first insurgent detachments were formed under the leadership of soviets of soldiers. One such detachment entered the town of Kyustendil and captured the headquarters of the Bulgarian army. From there it set out for Radomir, where it joined up with other detachments. An

entire insurgent army began to take shape. Radomir became the centre of the insurrection, which was headed by the eminent Agrarian militant, Raiko Daskalov. On September 27, 1918, in a special manifesto Daskalov announced the overthrow of the monarchy and proclaimed Bulgaria a republic.

A provisional government was set up. The leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, Alexander Stamboliiski, was proclaimed Prime Minister and Raiko Daskalov Commander-in-Chief of the insurrectionist forces.

A three-men revolutionary committee was set up in Radomir: a Left-wing Socialist,¹ a representative of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union² and an Anarchist. Its task was to organize and coordinate the operations of the insurgent detachments.

The provisional government in Radomir sent a wire to King Ferdinand, calling on him to abdicate. A special appeal was also issued, calling upon the insurgent forces and the working people to fight against the king and the government.

The number of insurgents rapidly swelled to 6,000. Bearing in mind the mass support it enjoyed among the population, this was a big force.

On September 29 the Insurgent army set out through the Vladaya Gorge, southwest of Sofia, towards the capital. Its first operations were crowned with success. It captured a number of bridgeheads for an all-out assault on Sofia, but late in the evening stopped its advance, probably expecting the king to abdicate of his own free choice.

The news about the insurrection which spread in the capital caused a veritable panic among the court and government circles. Shaken by these events, on September 25 the Government decided to ask for an armistice from the Allies, so as to stave off the insurrection.

First it proclaimed a state of siege in Sofia and sent out troops to block the road off the advancing

¹ The communists were then known as Left-wing Socialists

² The Agrarian Union, Bulgaria's Peasant Party

insurgent army. Supported by a German division and profiting from the halt of the insurgent forces, the government launched a counter-attack, and after overcoming the stubborn resistance of the insurgents, recaptured Pernik on October 1 and Radomir on October 2. The insurrection was thus quelled.

There were many reasons why the Vladaya, or the Soldiers' Insurrection, as it is often called, failed, but the main ones are the following:

Although the Party of Left-wing Socialists had done a good job in unmasking the predatory, anti-popular nature of the war and in winning over the masses of workers and soldiers, it still lacked the experience of a Marxist-Leninist Party: it was not yet a party of a Leninist type and had made no military preparations for the insurrection. It was unable to give a correct political orientation to the uprising and proved unable to head and organize the struggle of the soldiers and the population. It failed to give military leadership to the insurrection and, although the goals were clear, let it develop by and large spontaneously, unable to transform it into a well organized mass uprising. That is why it did not attain its final goal, but registered only a few temporary successes: the conclusion of an armistice and the abdication of King Ferdinand of Coburg-Gotha.

Although the Vladaya Insurrection did not lead to the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of worker-peasant rule, it helped to spread the ideas of the October Revolution under whose influence it had broken out and was the first, though spontaneous, attempt to turn the imperialist war into a civil war, to overthrow a bourgeois-monarchic regime and to establish democratic, republican rule.

In its future activities, the Party of Left-wing Socialists had to assess the positive as well as the negative sides in the organization and implementation of the insurrection. This is precisely what happened in the preparation of the September 1923 Uprising, in which it set itself the strategic task to overthrow the fascist regime and to set up worker-peasant rule.

After World War I the nation's agriculture and industry were in dire straits; many profiteers made their appearance. The cost of living rose with every passing day. Conditions were made even worse by the enslaving stipulations of the peace treaty. Bulgaria was deprived of Southern Thrace with its outlet to the Aegean Sea and was made to pay large contributions: it had not only to supply the victorious nations with much cattle and food, but also to support a large occupation army.

All this increased the dissatisfaction of the working people which they expressed at meetings, demonstrations and strikes, and sometimes led to open bloody clashes with the organs of the government.

Defending the interests of workers and peasants, the Left-wing Socialist Party rapidly grew in size and importance. Whereas on the eve of World War I it had only 103 cells and some 3,000 members, in March 1919 these came up to 582 with a membership of 21,577. Only two months later, it already had a membership of 25,000, and by the end of 1919, more than 35,000. The Party of Left-wing Socialists thus became a party of the Bulgarian proletariat and of the toiling peasants.

The numerical growth of the Party coincided with its ideological, organizational and tactical rearmament along Leninist lines. It broke with the opportunists of the Second International, moved closer to the Bolshevik Party and joined in raising the slogan for the establishment of a Third Communist International.

The October Revolution in Russia had a strong impact on the ideological formation of the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (left-wing Socialists). The Bolshevik experience taught it that socialism could be attained only by way of a proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship, based on an alliance between the working class and the toiling peasants.

Again under the influence of the October Revolution and of the Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin, at its 22nd Congress the Bulgarian Workers' Social

Democratic Party (Left-wing Socialists) assumed the name of Bulgarian Communist Party, which was reflected in its activity as a whole, including its activity for the setting up of an armed force of its own.

But the bourgeoisie, on its part, did not stay idle either. The growth of the communist movement and its intensified activity spread panic among the reactionaries. In the person of the communist movement they saw a real threat to their existence. The bourgeoisie therefore began to prepare for a showdown with the Communist Party, adopting fascist methods of work. This took place under the influence of the offensive of capital in the whole world, in particular of the Italian bourgeoisie, which had gone fascist.

The fascist movement in Bulgaria was headed by representatives of big business and the court, who early in 1922 set up a fascist organization called "Naroden Zgovor" (National Union). Its main support was the Military Officers' League within the army.

The immediate task of this fascist organization was to unite all bourgeois parties into a single bloc, with the aim of seizing power through a fascist coup d'état. It set out to win over the youth, the trade unions and other democratic organizations. In this set-up a revolutionary crisis came to a head.

In 1921 the fascists organized provocations against the Bulgarian Communist Party by means of armed groups and in 1922 they began to assume the offensive.

At the end of 1922, relations between the Bulgarian Communist Party and the ruling party, the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, began to deteriorate. Early in 1923 these relations turned into an overt fierce clash. Both parties were to blame for these unfortunate developments: the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, because it was out to set up an independent peasant rule without the participation of the communists, and the Bulgarian Communist Party, because it misjudged the significance of its alliance with the Agrarians, treated them on a par with the fascists. This misunderstanding of the role of the ally became manifest during the pre-

parations for and in the course of the September Uprising.

On June 9, 1923 the fascists, relying on the army, staged a coup d'état. The Agrarian Government was overthrown almost without any resistance and a fascist government was set up under Alexander Tsankov, which ushered in a reign of terror against the Communist Party.

The Communist Party had to take counter-measures: to give military training to its members and to undermine the royal bourgeois army.

At an underground conference in May 1919, it had elaborated a detailed military programme, in which the general strike and an armed uprising were set down as a necessary prerequisite for the triumph of the revolution. It thereupon instructed all its cells to set up militant and reconnaissance nuclei. In addition, all workers and poor peasants, the entire working class and low-income sections of the population capable of wearing arms, were to be armed.

In 1920 the Central Committee of the Party set up a Supreme Military Revolutionary College, which was entrusted with the task of the military preparation for an armed uprising. The Communist Party also started publishing a special newspaper, *Narodna Armiya* (People's Army) for the purpose of increasing the theoretical knowledge of its members.

The fascist coup d'état of June 9, 1923 gave rise to a new revolutionary wave. Workers and peasants rose spontaneously in a number of regions between June 9 and 12. But there was no proper leadership, no unity of action between Agrarians and Communists, no clearly defined goals. The Party proclaimed itself neutral, remained passive and failed to head the uprising. The situation was indeed revolutionary, there were forces ready to fight, but there was no one to organize and lead them.

This unsuccessful attempt was yet another proof that fascism and capitalism could not be defeated without a solid alliance between workers and peasants and that the revolutionary masses must be headed by

a revolutionary party, capable of devising the strategy and tactics for the revolutionary struggle.

Though unsuccessful, the uprising on June 9-12 laid solid foundations for the preparation and implementation of the September Uprising. A large quantity of arms remained in the hands of the insurgents, much revolutionary experience was accumulated and a military alliance began to be forged between communists and agrarians. The Party became more cautious and the organization and preparation of the uprising were raised to a higher ideological and political level. But the defeat of the uprising had a number of adverse consequences. Many communists and agrarians were arrested and killed. A press censorship was introduced, public meetings of the opposition parties were banned and every progressive thought was ruthlessly persecuted. Under these circumstances, the Communist Party proceeded to organize the September Uprising with the aim of overthrowing the monarcho-fascist regime and of establishing worker-peasant rule.

A resolution to steer the Party towards an armed uprising was adopted at the sitting of its Central Committee on August 5-7, 1923. The decision was taken to set up underground organizations among the soldiers in the Sofia and other garrisons. These were set the task of organizing propaganda in the army, of preparing its members for military action and safeguarding the Party clubs. On the very eve of the uprising, at the instruction of the Party, many young communists entered the army as volunteers with the secret aim of getting armed and of persuading the soldiers to join the uprising. The arms needed for the uprising had to be procured in advance by taking them from the municipalities and military storehouses.

A General Revolutionary Committee, headed by Georgi Dimitrov and Vassil Kolarov, was established to lead the uprising. It comprised several sectors: one for military operations, another for mobilization and administration, a third for sanitation, a fourth for supplies, etc.

Realizing that a successful uprising required allies,

the Bulgarian Communist Party attempted to win over to its side the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, the Social Democratic Party, the Craftsmen's Union, the General Trade Unions, the co-operatives, Anarcho-Communists, in short, all who opposed fascism. The alliance was established under the slogan, put forward by Georgi Dimitrov, of a united front against fascism, of rallying and uniting all democratic forces against the onslaught of fascism.

The uprising was to be preceded by nationwide strikes and demonstrations. These were to intensify the anti-fascist and revolutionary sentiments among the working class, to aggravate relations between workers and employers with a view to creating a revolutionary set-up. On August 22, 1923, the Central Committee of the Party issued an appeal to the workers, poor citizens and peasants to combat the fascist gangs, sent from Sofia to the other towns in the country. Two days later, it sent to all Party committees and organizations a circular letter in which the communists were called upon to put up resolute resistance against the fascist onslaught.

The organizing work for the preparation of the uprising was in the hands of the Young Communist League. Conferences were held, the aims and purposes of the uprising were elucidated, and the main danger was pointed out. Everything was subordinated to the preparation and successful implementation of the uprising.

The Central Committee of the Party devoted great attention to the military preparation of the uprising. The military-technical committee called a conference at which the general plan of the uprising, later approved by the Central Committee, was detailed. The uprising was to break out simultaneously all over the country but, if for some unforeseen reasons it should break out in certain districts before the set time, the neighbouring districts were to rush to their assistance, without waiting for special instruction. Aid for Sofia had also been provided, for the strong garrison in the capital could not possibly have been defeated without the support of forces from other regions and especially from

the neighbouring Vratsa district, where the communist movement was the strongest and the uprising was best prepared.

On the basis of this plan, the district committees elaborated plans of their own, which provided for the forces, their armament and method of action. Detailed plans were made for the cutting off of railway lines, the blowing up of bridges and the interruption of telegraph and telephone communications.

On September 20, 1923, a Plenary Session of the Central Committee was called, which approved the plan of the uprising and an instruction to the local revolutionary committees. It contained detailed instructions on how the uprising should be carried out and on what should be done after the conquest of power. To preserve secrecy, the decision on the date of the uprising was sent out by couriers. The uprising was to start on the 22nd of September at night. On the eve of the uprising the Party leaders left for the different places to direct it personally. Georgi Dimitrov, Vassil Kolarov and Gavril Genov left for Vratsa district which lies 130 km from the capital.

As is obvious, unlike the Vladaya and June 1923 uprisings, the September 1923 Uprising was meticulously prepared. The Party had taken into consideration the strength of the military organization of the fascist government and the failures of the two preceding uprisings. From neutrality, it had to pass over to an active Leninist strategy and tactics, to get rid of its doctrinaire and dogmatic approach to the problems of revolutionary theory and practice and to come out of its opportunist passiveness. It was helped along this line chiefly by the Party Leaders Georgi Dimitrov and Vassil Kolarov. The open discussion which condemned the tactics of neutrality and passiveness and which demanded that the Party should orient itself toward the masses also helped it, as without them the uprising could not be successful.

The organization of the September Uprising and its preparation can best be seen in the district of Vratsa, where Gavril Genov was Secretary of the District Com-

mittee. He put all his energy into play. Possessing great talent and experience as organizer, he rallied around himself a phalanx of selfless revolutionaries and placed the whole district in revolutionary readiness.

The work here was distributed as follows: the general leadership and preparation of the uprising in two counties (Berkovitsa and Ferdinand) was assumed by Gavril Genov, and in the remaining part of the district it was distributed among the members of the district committee: Ivan Kinov, Ivan Petrov, Hristo Mihailov and Zamfir Popov. A reserve committee had also been envisaged, which was to assume the leadership in case the members of the district committee were arrested. Under the leadership of Gavril Genov, many meetings and sittings were held at which the new Party line was explained and the questions connected with the preparation of the uprising and the setting up of a United Anti-fascist Front were specified.

Along with the political preparations, the district committee carried out far-reaching military and technical preparation, comprising a far-flung activity among the army, work connected with the supply of weapons to the masses and the elaboration of a detailed plan for mobilizing the population.

A 10-day term was set for the elaboration of the plan of the uprising in Vratsa district, after which it had to be presented to the Central Committee of the Party for approval.

As mentioned above, a transfer of forces from Vratsa to Sofia was envisaged, to succour the capital. This was not accidental. The fact had been taken into consideration that in this region there were weapons which had been hidden from the control of the victor states in World War I, which, if found, would be a solid base for the armament of the insurgent forces throughout the country.

Besides, this region made it possible for the forces set aside for Sofia to be transferred secretly and along several routes as well as to develop a mass partisan movement.

On August 20 the plan was ready. It provided that

the uprising should start on X-day after midnight simultaneously in the whole district, and that the county centres should be captured by dawn. If the strong military garrison in Vratsa was to put up stout resistance and to hold its positions, on the following night the insurgents of the three counties of Ferdinand, Vratsa and Berkovitsa were to attack it. After the capture of Vratsa, the insurgents were set the task to advance towards Sofia.

On the basis of the district plan, the plans for the counties were elaborated. They provided for specific actions aimed at the capture of the towns, and detailed the forces needed for this purpose.

Along with the elaboration of the plans for the uprising, a military organization supplied with arms was set up and much work was done inside the army and the intelligence services to find out the intentions of the enemy.

The military revolutionary organization was built up as an underground organization on the territorial principle, by towns, villages, hamlets and wards.

The smallest unit of the military organization was the ten-men 'group' equal to an army section. Next came the combat group, which comprised several ten-men groups and was roughly equal to one or two platoons. Such was the military organization during the first stage. Later on, larger military units, such as battalions and regiments began to be formed. The establishment of six regiments was envisaged in Vratsa district, each one consisting of three detachments. Officers and non-coms of the reserve, communists and agrarians with a good military training, were appointed as commanders of the ten-men groups, combat groups, battalions, detachments and regiments. Most of them were World War I veterans and experienced soldiers.

Next in importance was the problem of armaments. On the one hand, all available weapons had to be kept hidden in a safe place and, on the other, new weapons had to be looked for. All barns, trunks, atticks were searched and military storehouses were attacked. As a result of steadfast work, on the eve of the uprising

the military organization in Vratsa district had 700 rifles, 2 machine guns, 100 pistols, 40 to 50 granades and several thousand cartridges at its disposal.

The Vratsa district committee developed a lively activity also among the army. Links were established with many officers of the reserve who had been called to serve in the barracks. A great number of Komsomol members had been sent to serve as volunteers in the army. The organization of the uprising was in full swing. Individual companies were ready to pass over to the side of the risen working people as soon as the uprising broke out.

The reconnaissance in the district was also well-organized. From many places there came signals that the fascist government was going to undertake mass arrests of communists and agrarians on September 12. The district committee thereupon issued instructions to all suspected communists to pass underground. But in spite of this, some 100 persons in the district were arrested and contact with Sofia was broken. Owing to treachery, the enemy learnt not only the day fixed for the outbreak of the uprising, but also the place where the General Revolutionary Committee was to have its headquarters. On September 22 the fascists started a series of mass arrests. The leaders of the uprising, Georgi Dimitrov and Vassil Kolarov, were exposed to great risks and it was only by a miracle that they saved themselves.

The September 1923 Uprising did not start simultaneously throughout the country. In one region it broke out earlier and in other regions, later. On September 23 it was in full swing, assuming a mass character in the districts of Vratsa and Stara Zagora. In the assault on Stara Zagora, the district centre, 523 insurgents took part, in that on Chirpan — 200. In Vratsa district, where the uprising assumed the greatest proportions, there were 172 Party organizations with 3,929 members. The district organization of the Komsomol had a membership of 1,795, the trade union sections — 642, and the women's groups — 178.

On September 23 the county town of Ferdinand

(now Mihailovgrad) in Vratsa district was the first to fall into the hands of the insurgents. Worker-peasant rule was set up in the town. This was the first major victory of the insurgents. However, the same day in the afternoon, the town was recaptured by an infantry battalion of the Vratsa garrison, which had arrived by railway. Thereupon, the leaders of the uprising directed towards the town a battalion of 750 insurgents called Lopoushanska Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Georgi Damyanov, Party leader of the Lopoushanski region. Its attack proved irresistible. The resistance of the Vratsa infantry battalion was broken. The insurgents recaptured the town named after King Ferdinand, where in a short time they mobilized some 10,000 men. Thanks to its good organization, the uprising encompassed hundreds of villages. Seven county towns were captured and 35 major battles were fought.

But the uprising failed and was drowned in blood. Thousands of men, women and children were killed, shot or hanged. The river bed of the Ogosta River, flowing through the town of Ferdinand, was full of dead bodies. Hundreds of graves without cross or name appeared. Thousands of women began to wear black headkerchiefs and towns and villages were full of orphans. More than 15,000 people were thrown into prison.

Although it failed, the uprising showed what people are capable of when they fight for freedom and have a strong revolutionary party. It showed that when there is a good organization, when the masses are properly led and have an efficient leadership, they can overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish a worker-peasant government, a proletarian dictatorship of their own. Although the risen people failed to retain power, the impact of the uprising was considerable and the lessons it taught invaluable. The Bulgarian Communist Party acquired great experience in organizing and leading the revolutionary struggle, especially in the setting up of a worker-peasant army of their own, without which the success of an uprising is inconceivable.

The September Uprising laid the foundations of the Bulgarian Worker-Peasant Army. Some called it "red", others "revolutionary", still others "worker-peasant revolutionary army". But in spite of these different names, it was the same in character, an army of revolutionary workers and peasants. September 23, 1923, the day on which the September Uprising broke out and the revolutionary detachments and battalions inflicted the most serious defeat on the well equipped and armed government forces, is considered as the birthday of the Bulgarian People's Army.

The organizational structure of the revolutionary army was to a certain extent borrowed from the royal army. It consisted of sections, platoons, companies and battalions; detachments were also introduced. The infantry constituted the foundation of the insurgent army. Artillery and cavalry played a minor role.

The feeding and clothing of the insurgents was one of the greatest concerns of the Party, because they had no organized rear nor organs in the rear. But a way out was found. The revolutionary committees, which represented the organs of government, imposed a tax on the population payable in goods and products. The needs of the People's Army were thus satisfied.

Born in the flames of the September Uprising, the new insurgent army had all the features of a people's revolutionary army. Its ranks were joined by workers, peasants and many representatives of the progressive intelligentsia. In every battalion there was a proletarian nucleus. Some 70 per cent were peasants. From a political viewpoint, too, the army was popular: it united communists, Komsomol members, agrarians, non-affiliated anti-fascists and an insignificant number of anarchists, radicals and right-wing socialists. From a national viewpoint, it included not only Bulgarians but also Turks, Jews and Armenians. In other words, it was an embodiment of the united anti-fascist front of the working people from town and village and of its unbreakable backbone, the worker-peasant alliance. Although the ranks of the insurgent army were joined by people who were members of different parties, the

leading role belonged to the Bulgarian Communist Party (Left-wing Socialists). It implemented this role through the commanders of the insurgent units, most of whom were communists.

The insurgent army was not small. We can judge about its size by the number of battalions and detachments in Northwestern Bulgaria, where 13 battalions and 42 detachments were organized. Every detachment comprised 200 to 300 men.

The commanders of the insurgent units were men versed in military matters. Most of them had had some military training. The soldiers, having passed through the barracks or taken part in World War I, had a lot of battle experience.

The manner in which the insurgent army was recruited was also an eloquent proof of its popular character. At first it was recruited from among volunteers, but later men were mobilized. The Party and its revolutionary committees carried out a mobilization in the true sense of the word. Not only men were recruited, but also horses, carts, oxen, products.

The insurgent army had also its medical organs and establishments. At many places hospitals were opened for the treatment of wounded insurgents and the doctors were proclaimed as mobilized.

We can judge about the character of the insurgent army from its discipline which was based on revolutionary consciousness. Not coercion, but high political consciousness inspired the insurgents to carry out the orders of their commanders and the Party's directives.

The unsuccessful end of the September Uprising was the third successive battle lost by the Party in the struggle against the class enemy.

Although insurgents continued to be active as late as 1925 in certain parts of the country, the battle with the enemy was lost. An ebb set in among the Party ranks, an ebb from the revolution. The opportunist elements, who had opposed armed struggle and hence the uprising, took advantage of this setback for their own ends. They subjected the Bolshevik nucleus of the

Party to demagogical criticism and tried to discredit it among all strata of the working people. Thus, a sectarian line was imposed on the Party and it became isolated from the masses.

The leaders of the Communist Party, Georgi Dimitrov and Vassil Kolarov, with the aid of the Comintern, drew far-reaching conclusions. They bared the real reasons for the failure of the first anti-fascist uprising in the world in September 1923 and for the loss of the insurgent army as an armed force of the Party. And to reveal these reasons meant to see the real weaknesses and shortcomings in the organization and leadership of the revolutionary struggle, to see the mistakes made by the Party both in the preparation and in the implementation of the uprising. Without such an analysis and finding of the mistakes, success in the further revolutionary struggle would have been inconceivable.

Many of the causes of the defeat of the September Uprising were repeated. Some of them were the same as in the two preceding uprisings: absence of uniform leadership, insufficient preparation, lack of proper coordination of operations, non-coordinated outbreak of the uprising, unstable worker-peasant alliance, opportunist views of some Party members in Sofia and in the provinces, and inadequate work within the army, both prior to and during the uprising. Although theoretically all were aware of the need of an armed force led by the Party, in practice its significance was underestimated. The defeat of the September Uprising showed that the Party had failed to draw proper conclusions from the defeat of the Vladaya and June Uprisings, that it had not become fully Bolshevik in character and had failed to master the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary fight, as well as to become a general staff of the proletariat in its struggle against fascism.

The main force which the fascist government used in crushing the uprising was the army. Had it been neutralized and won over, the uprising would have succeeded.

These defects were taken into account by the Party in its further revolutionary activity and in its preparations for the September 1944 Uprising, which had set itself the task of routing fascism and setting up a people's democratic government.

The September 1923 Uprising shook the capitalist system in Bulgaria. Despite the temporary ebb from the Party and the revolution and the fruitless search for new forms of work, it did manage to draw the basic conclusions, overcame the crisis and by the beginning of World War II came out with a clearly defined Leninist course.

"We consider the anti-fascist people's uprising in September 1923, which was organized and headed by the Bulgarian Communist Party, as a turning point in the development of the Party from Left-wing Socialism to Bolshevism," Georgi Dimitrov said at the Fifth Party Congress.

The September 1923 Uprising was a valuable lesson for the Party in its activity throughout the period of 1923-41. It rid itself of sectarianism and entered the mass organizations, skilfully combining legal with underground methods of work. All anti-fascist forces were enlisted in the fight against fascism. A united anti-fascist front was set up. Mass strikes, demonstrations and street protests became permanent forms of work. The Party penetrated the masses and struck deep roots among them. It devoted special attention to its work in the army, with a view to winning it over. An important role along this line was played by the Party cells set up in the army.

2. NATIONAL LIBERATION INSURGENT ARMY

A turning point for the Bulgarian Communist Party and the whole Bulgarian people was the heinous attack of nazi Germany against the Soviet Union in 1941. From a struggle by peaceful means, the Party switched over to an armed struggle. When the first socialist country of the proletariat, the USSR, was in danger, it was the duty of all men in the world to rise

in its defence. For the communists there existed no alternative but to fight against fascism, arms in hand.

There was no alternative for the Bulgarian Communist Party, nor for the Bulgarian communists either. Having prepared itself in the course of many years for a revolution, the Communist Party could not but proclaim its solidarity with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet peoples, and lead the Bulgarian working people in an open fight against fascism. On the very same day (June 22, 1941) on which nazi Germany started its open aggression against the Soviet Union, the Bulgarian Communist Party issued an appeal in which it explained its stand with respect to the conflict. After condemning the German act of aggression, it called upon the Bulgarian people not to render any assistance to the German army and not to let Bulgaria be dragged into the war on the side of nazi Germany.

"Not a grain of Bulgarian wheat, not a piece of Bulgarian bread to the German nazis and marauders! Not a single Bulgarian in their service! Not a single soldier on the Eastern Front!" the appeal read.

Only two days later, on June 24, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party took the decision to start preparing the Bulgarian people for an armed struggle against the nazi occupiers and the Bulgarian monarcho-fascists, with a view to overthrowing the fascist government and establishing people's democratic rule in Bulgaria. For the implementation of this task, a Central Military Committee was created at the Party's Central Committee. Military committees were also set up at the district Party committees.

The general task set by the Politburo was thus specified: to organize combat groups for the sabotage of nazi communications, agricultural and industrial production and for attacking German military targets and military units, and for the destruction of finished products destined for the German army; to step up the work within the army and rally all democratic forces in the country into a broad anti-fascist front.

The Party proceeded to the implementation of these tasks, fully aware of the great difficulties that arose not only from the struggle itself, but also from the fact that nazi occupiers against whom this struggle was to be waged, had entered Bulgaria not by force, but as "allies", at the invitation of the Bulgarian fascist government.

While the Yugoslav and Greek partisans fought against the German army which had occupied them by force, the Bulgarian partisans had to fight against the Bulgarian forces. It sometimes happened that from one family the elder brother was a partisan and the younger — a soldier of the royal army. Thus, the Bulgarian bourgeoisie caused brother to fight against brother and father against son.

The police undertook terror actions against the honest people who voiced their protest against the nazi occupation and the transformation of the army into a gendarme. Many patriots were arrested and thrown into prisons and concentration camps without a trial. Others were brought to trumped-up court trials, accused of having been traitors to their country.

The fascist government had at its disposal a large police force and gendarmerie. It relied on them with greater assurance than on the army. There were many young people in the army who had a progressive outlook, officers of the reserve who had been mobilized until the end of the war and who served against their will and showed no eagerness or diligence in their service. Many of them did not share the political views of the fascist government. Still, the army as a whole was a tool in the hands of the king and was used for the attainment of the goals which the Bulgarian bourgeoisie had set to it. How far the army would co-operate for the attainment of these goals depended in large measure upon the work which the Party would be able to do within its ranks.

The first touchstone along this line was the slogan raised by the Party: "Not a single Bulgarian soldier on the Eastern Front!" Not to allow the Bulgarian army to take part in the war against the Soviet Union consti-

tuted the core of all the explanatory work within the army, both in the barracks and outside them. This was how the work of the Party aimed at disintegrating the army and at winning it over to the side of the people and against fascism started.

To safeguard its cadres against pogroms, the Central Committee issued instructions that all members of the district and county committees and all members of the Party and of the Young Workers' League threatened with arrest should go into hiding, supplying themselves with weapons and continuing the fight in underground conditions. These instructions were carried out by hundreds of communists and Youth Workers League members. In the summer of 1941, the beginning of the partisan movement was laid and the first stage of its development began.

The first partisan detachments appeared in the neighbourhood of the following inhabited places: Batak, Chepelaré, Doupnitsa (now Stanké Dimitrov), Karlovo, Sevlievo and Gabrovo. They were small in size and poorly armed, but were daring in their actions. Parallel with the partisan movement, combat groups began also to spring in towns and in rural areas. Their aim was to perform sabotage actions and to keep the rear of the nazi army in constant insecurity.

In July and August 1941 the fighting groups in Sofia carried out 30 sabotage actions. Owing to the frequent sabotage actions, the transport of goods and foodstuffs along the railway lines and roads to the nazi forces became insecure. Sabotage actions were organized also in industry and in agriculture. By damaging and breaking factory machines, by slow work and frequent absences from work, by a general loosening of labour discipline, production in individual industrial enterprises dropped as much as 40 to 50 per cent. The peasants, on their part, hid away their produce and spoiled the quality of the goods that were to go to the Germans. The dissatisfaction against the policy of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie spread also among the mobilized soldiers and officers who were sent to our southeastern frontier. Disturbance broke out in the 11th and 29th

Infantry Regiments of the 3rd Balkan Division. The soldiers raised slogans for demobilization and return to their homes and protested against Bulgaria being dragged into the war on the side of nazi Germany. Mass anti-military unrest developed also in some units of the 10th Infantry Division. These manifestations were all positive, but they did not yet mean that the army had disintegrated and been won over to the Party's cause. Work on a large scale and of long duration was needed for the solution of this task. The difficulty was also increased by the fact that the Soviet army was not only far away from Bulgaria's frontiers, but until the end of 1942 was itself forced to retreat.

The setting up of underground soldiers' Party organizations was a task of prime importance for the Party Committees in whose inhabited places there were military units. With the aid of these organizations, the Party did all the explanatory work against the nazi occupation and the mercenary policy of the Bulgarian government. The communists who worked in the army had the task to gather information about the disposition of the military units, their movement, the location of storehouses containing arms and ammunition, the condition of the troops guarding the different military storehouses, to perform sabotage actions and, whenever they fell under suspicion, to take their arms and join the partisans. One of their main tasks was to organize the removal of arms, which was needed both by the partisan detachments and by the Party and Komsomol functionaries who were doing political and organizing work in the towns.

In 1942 the Party had contacts with many garrisons in the country. Underground soldiers' organizations had been set up in many military units. How active they were can be seen from the fact that conspiracies in as many as 81 military units were discovered in 1942. These constituted nearly one third of the whole army.

Through its underground groups and organizations, the Party explained the goals of the partisan struggle and its just character, insisting that the Soviet army was going to defeat the nazi invaders and that after

the liberation of the Soviet lands, the liberation of the Bulgarian people would also come. The discovered underground organizations and groups were but an insignificant part of a wide network which the Party organized in the years of 1940-44. The scope of the underground activities developed by the Communist Party within the army can be seen from an intelligence report of Army Headquarters of August 28, 1942, in which, among other thing, we read: "The onslaught of communism against the army is universal, persistent and well-organized. Making an effective use of the cadres of the Young Workers' League, it has penetrated all military units, administrations and institutions without exception."

The entire activity of the Bulgarian Communist Party, both in the barracks and outside, was performed under the banner of the Fatherland Front. The idea and initiative for the setting up of this mass political organization, which united all anti-fascist forces in the country, belonged to the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Georgi Dimitrov. He personally elaborated the programme of the Fatherland Front which was announced over the Hristo Botev radio station situated in Soviet territory on July 17, 1942.

The programme of the Fatherland Front explained that the policy which was pursued by the royal government constituted a national danger for Bulgaria and that it was pushing the country to the brink of the abyss. It was pointed out in the said programme that the supreme duty of the Bulgarian people, of their army and intelligentsia, was to rally around the banner of the Fatherland Front and save Bulgaria.

The implementation of the programme of the Fatherland Front was considered by the Bulgarian Communist Party an inevitable and decisive stage for the country's further development towards far-reaching political, economic and social changes.

The fascist government and its police had great experience in the fight against the Party. They were learning from the Gestapo and had earned a high reputation as zealous defenders of the interests of the

reactionary Bulgarian bourgeoisie. While the nazl army was advancing, the Bulgarian reactionaries and police displayed an aggressive spirit; this was also true of the reactionary officers in the army.

But when the Soviet army started its counter-offensive, and especially after the capture of the 330,000-men strong German army at Stalingrad, a turning point set in. The partisans were gripped with enthusiasm. A revolutionary wave swept the nation and the revolutionary forces picked up momentum. New detachments made their appearance, and the existing ones increased in number. The partisan movement assumed larger proportions and attained a higher stage. This second stage embraced the time from the month of April 1943 to May 1944 and was characterized by the fact that the partisan movement went over from defensive actions to the offensive, that the individual detachments united into a national-liberation army with its own general staff.

The activation and spread of the partisan movement among the masses went hand in hand with an intensification of all sectors of Party work.

In August 1943 the National Committee of the Fatherland Front was founded. It was joined by representatives of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, the Social Democratic Party and the Zveno political circle. Following the example of the National Committee, Fatherland Front committees were set up throughout the country. On the eve of the uprising, in September 1944, there were some 670 Fatherland Front committees with a total of 3,637 members — all stalwart anti-fascists.

The Bulgarian Communist Party, the only party which firmly and consistently fought for the interests of the working people and which never abandoned its post, was the organizer, leader and inspirer of the Fatherland Front.

On Georgi Dimitrov's instruction, in the spring of 1943 the National Liberation Insurgent Army established its General Staff. The country was divided into 12 insurgent zones. This made it possible for the opera-

tions of all units to be directed from one centre, and for this centre to implement the decisions of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the insurgent zones. In the zones there were brigades, detachments, battalions and regiments. A brigade comprised two or three battalions, a battalion two or three companies, and a company, several platoons. Each of these units (including the battalion) had a commander, a commissar, a deputy commissar, a chief of staff and a quartermaster. The deputy commissar was usually also the Party secretary. In every fighting unit there was a Party and a Kom-somol organization. The best soldiers, who had shown ability in the battles against the enemy, were elected as members of these organizations.

Each zone had a commander, a political commissar, a chief of staff and instructors. The commander and the chief of staff spent most of their time with the detachments. They took part in organizing the military units, in planning the military operations and in coordinating their operations with those of other partisan units. Whenever they were unable to be present in person, they sent their instructors, who communicated the instructions of the commanders of the zone. The staff of the zone elaborated the general plan of the military and political operations. The brigades and detachments within its territory drew up their plans on the basis of this plan.

Newspapers were published in most of the zones. They contained political articles, information about the situation on the fronts and reported on skilfully performed actions of the partisans.

The General Staff of the National Liberation Army was headed by men with considerable revolutionary experience: Emil Markov, Hristo Mihailov, Vlado Trichkov, and others. They directed the operations through instructors but often went in person to the partisan detachments. In the second stage, the partisan struggle assumed a more organized character. Minor operations of small detachments were replaced by major actions. Coordination on a national scale was also improved. Many combat units were switched to other regions to

take part in actions in conjunction with other fighting units.

The activation and spread of the partisan movement among the masses threw the government and the whole bourgeoisie into a state of alarm. Persons suspected of helping the partisans were arrested and shot. Many houses of partisans and helpers were burned down and their families interned in distant regions. The police offered great bribes for betrayal. Big awards were given to those who killed or caught a partisan.

While in the beginning the police, gendarmerie and the specially formed counter-partisan posses were used mainly in fighting the anti-fascists, later on, and especially in the first months of 1944, the government threw also the regular army into the fight. Its aim was to make the officers also stain their hands with blood, to get the soldiers involved morally and politically and thus to lend a mass character to the fight against the partisan movement.

Discerning the serious threat to his rear in Bulgaria, Hitler ordered the Bulgarian fascist command to elaborate a detailed plan for the wiping out of the partisan movement. This plan provided for large scale actions aimed at surrounding the partisan detachments, at disrupting their connections with their supply bases and the people and at annihilating them.

In the spring of 1944 a campaign was launched in the Sredna Gora Mountains against the partisans with an army of 20,000 soldiers, gendarmes and police force members. At the same time in the Trun region two big campaigns were carried out, in March and in May, in which nearly 50,000 took part, and in all about 100,000 men — soldiers, gendarmerie and police — were thrown against the partisan movement. The campaigns were most carefully and thoroughly prepared and organized. Aviation, artillery, mine-throwers were used and in the plains also tanks. But in spite of all, the results of these campaigns were insignificant. This was due, on the one hand, to the exceptional manoeuvrability and agility of the partisan units and, on the other, to the great support of the population, including the soldiers, who in

many cases shot in the air and did not put any serious efforts into the battles with the partisans. In the beginning the partisans, when encountering army units, tried to win them over rather than to fight them. These tactics often led to unwarranted losses. Experience taught them to change their tactics. They began to enter into open battle with the soldiers, inflicting on them heavy blows that brought them to their senses, and in their majority they began to realize that the partisans were strong and that it was senseless to fight them.

Of great significance for the success of the partisans were also their flexible and diversified tactics: sudden attacks, avoidance of clashes with a superior enemy, wide application of the system of ambushes. The force of the partisans, the armed fist of the Party, consisted in the first place in their strong links with the people. Practice showed that detachments, which used dug-outs and maintained only occasional contact with the population, were easily discovered, surrounded by the enemy and annihilated, or sustained severe losses, while detachments that were constantly in touch with the people and had taken their position among them, thrived, increased in number and their prestige grew. Contact with the people, the steady links with the population, enabled the partisans to be always well-informed about the intentions of the enemy.

The campaigns of partisans should never be isolated from the people. That is why it is necessary for them always to consult the people, especially so when it is a question of punishing a man whom the people know. Without consulting the people, great political errors may be committed, i.e. the people may not approve of what the partisans are doing and this may lead to a rift between the population and its armed force. Constant contact created conditions for such consultations.

The Bulgarian peasants rendered substantial support to the partisans, not only by supplying them with food and shelter. The people purposely exaggerated tenfold the numerical composition and armament of the partisans when asked by the police. Thus, in the eyes of the enemy, the detachments were presented as being

many times larger and stronger and this exercised a highly demoralizing effect on the police and army that had to tackle the partisans.

But sometimes the police, too, exaggerated the number and ammunition of the partisans. It did this whenever it failed to cope with them and was looking for an excuse. Thus, according to the blown-up reports of the police, many partisan detachments had cavalry, artillery and mine-throwers.

A big problem for the partisans was how to get hold of arms. Self-supply was insufficient to meet the ever growing need for arms, especially in the spring and summer of 1944, when the Party mobilized its members, the members of the Youth League and the Fatherland Front. To procure arms from the enemy was not always possible. The enemy was strong, well-armed and vigilant. The only thing on which the Bulgarian partisans could pin its hopes was the Soviet army. But the latter was still far away. It was only when it approached our boundaries and contacts were established that some detachments received larger quantities of arms.

Mobilization was implemented in the real and fullest meaning of the word. Call-up orders were delivered (written and oral) with fixed dates, and hundreds of young men, girls and grown-ups joined the detachments. About the scale and the speed of the mobilization we can judge from the fact that the detachment headed by the author increased from 120 in February 1944 to 700 in May. This made it possible to form two brigades, each of which had 320 to 350 soldiers.

Naturally, the movement of such large units was harder, but that is why they were strong and capable of engaging in battles.

The partisan units had their rear organs, but did not have any permanent supply bases. They got their supplies directly from the population, without paying for what they received. When they had to buy something and had no money, they contracted loans from richer people.

Activity was the salient feature of many partisan units. The military operations were always combined

with political ones. The better the population was acquainted with the political setup and the developments, the more active was its help in the fight. The activity of the partisans confused the enemy.

The Central Committee of the Party and the General Staff of the National Liberation Army required that the detachments and brigades be constantly on the go. The detachments which were active from the very start and punished the enemies of the people, surprised the fascists, and their casualties were far lower than in those regions where the partisan movement was passive.

The partisans' activity was always combined with high mobility. When the detachments kept moving from one region to another, the enemy found it difficult to discover and pursue them. And vice versa, the staying of the partisan units at one place for a longer time facilitated the police in discovering their traces and in their pursuit.

The partisan detachments did a tremendous amount of political work. They explained the Party policy and its attitude towards major events, the aim of the fight and the difficulties involved, as well as the prospects awaiting the people. Many detachments and brigades had a printing press or a machine for mimeographing copies, on which they printed leaflets, bulletins and other material. This propaganda played an important role in winning over the broadest strata of the population and in their revolutionization.

The winter months constituted a serious problem for the partisans, not only because movement was more difficult, but also because their stationing in villages involved great risks. This made it necessary for many detachments to break up into small groups, because they erroneously assumed that thus they would be better able to preserve their forces, so as to continue their activities in spring, when the weather would be milder. This misconception led to dire consequences, because the breaking up into groups weakened the fighting capacity of the detachment and made it vulnerable.

The partisan movement in Bulgaria was directed

by the Bulgarian Communist Party, through the vital links of the partisan units with the Party committees as well as through the presence of members of the Bulgarian Communist Party and of its district committees in the units. In connexion with major events, the Central Committee and the district committees came forward with appeals, circular letters and special bulletins, in which a military and political assessment was made of every new situation, and the tasks arising from it were set to the units.

At the same time, the Party organ, *Rabotnichesko Delo*, appeared, elucidating the Party's political course, popularizing the partisan movement, pointing out the most valuable experiences and directing the fight.

Georgi Dimitrov, with his directives, instructions and speeches which were published underground or broadcast over the Hristo Botev Radio Station, played a very important role in the setting up and development of the partisan movement. Following developments closely, he evaluated them promptly, correctly directed the activity of the Party and the General Staff and helped them avoid mistakes. This leadership was constant, day-to-day. Georgi Dimitrov was a man possessed of a very sharp mind, a colossal revolutionary experience and capable of seeing far into the future. The Bulgarian Communist Party was proud to have such a leader.

In the spring of 1944 the Soviet army approached the Bulgarian frontiers. Initiative had passed over into Soviet hands. The various military operations brought about the liberation of vast territories of Soviet land and frustrated all plans of the nazis to resume their offensive. These successes of the Soviet army still further fanned the enthusiasm of the working people and galvanized the partisan movement, raising it to a new, higher stage. This third stage extended from May to August 1944, and was characterized by an attempt to create a free territory as a result of strong vacillations in the royal army, by the passing over of entire military units to the side of the partisans and by the profound conviction of the people that fascism was being

wiped out and that they would take the destinies of Bulgaria into their own hands.

In the spring and summer of 1944, the National Liberation Army became a substantial military force. By that time in the Sofia insurgent operative zone alone four brigades and eight detachments were in operation, and in the whole country — 11 partisan brigades, 37 detachments, individual companies and hundreds of combat groups. Every detachment consisted of 50 to 700 men. In general, in 1943-44 the brigades and detachments comprised more than 30,000 men, supported by more than 200,000 collaborators.

Following the instructions of Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian Communist Party set up a nation-wide internal front against the nazis. According to official data of the military fascist reconnaissance, in 1943 alone the partisan units and combat groups in Bulgaria made 1,606 attacks, diversions and sabotage actions. In October and November 1943, these actions came up to 554, and in June 1944 to 415.

The setting up of large partisan units and the great concentration of forces for the annihilation of the partisan units imposed new tactics on the partisan movement. The regions and zones ceased to be a barrier to the great manoeuvres of the National Liberation Army. Everything was now subordinated to the task of creating a liberated zone, a far-reaching mobilization of the population and the preparation of the decisive blow against the fascist regime.

Initially a "liberated zone" meant a zone in which partisan units stayed for some time. Later this meant a zone in which the partisan units were able to stay for a longer time and to establish organs of people's rule. In a "liberated zone" the partisans did political, organizing and mobilizing work. They performed tactical drills with or without shooting, held meetings, recruited partisans, changed the administrative organs by replacing them with new ones who took care of the partisans' food supply. This is how the organs of the people's government began to come into being and how

the National Liberation Army, the forerunner of the Bulgarian People's Army, began to assume shape.

Besides the organization, training and military operations, the military oath and the fighting banners were two factors that lent the partisan units the aspect of a regular army. Almost all partisan units had their banners — red and tricolour. Emblems, initials and texts were depicted on the banners. Most typical among the emblems were the hammer and sickle and the five-pointed star, and most typical among the texts: "Fatherland Front", "Death to Fascism, Freedom for the People!" and the name of the partisan unit. The most courageous partisans were chosen as standard-bearers, most often young men and girls who would never abandon the banner or allow it to fall into the hands of the enemy. With the banner, the partisans marched into battle, because it had an inspiring effect, especially when unfurled by the standard-bearer who swayed it and marched forward.

The partisans gave an oath, like the soldiers in the barracks. The taking of the oath was ceremoniously performed with the corresponding mobilizing and inspiring ritual. A beautiful forest glade was usually chosen for the taking of the oath, and sometimes the ceremony was performed in an inhabited locality. For the oath, the military unit would line up in rows of two or three, the command would be given to stand at attention, the commander would then read the text and the fighters would repeat it after him.

In the oath the partisans assumed the obligation to serve their people honestly and devotedly and not to spare their life for the liberation of their country from fascism, not to reveal secrets that might serve the enemy, and if they betrayed their promise, that disgrace and the severest punishment should befall them.

In certain detachments there were Red Army men, soldiers and officers who had become prisoners of the nazis and who had succeeded in contacting the partisans, of escaping from captivity and joining the detachments. Here they held lectures on the use of arms, on tactics, readily sharing their great experience gained

in the battles with the enemy. In many cases their presence and commands, given out during a battle, sowed fear and confusion in the ranks of the enemy.

The partisan movement in Bulgaria developed in close contact with the partisan movements in Yugoslavia and Greece. In their actions the partisans were not confined by national boundaries. It did not matter whether they were on Yugoslav, Bulgarian or Greek territory. The important thing was to fight the enemy and attain the goal. It was here that in practice the supreme principle of proletarian internationalism was manifested, a principle by which the Bulgarian partisans were invariably guided in their selfless fight against fascism.

Among the partisan units of the different countries tactical and operative coordination was established. Tactical interaction was expressed in a coordination of action of small partisan units against minor targets, in rendering armed aid, in mutual information and exchanges of experience. It was organized between the commanders of the partisan units, on the basis of a general operative plan.

Operative coordination was implemented by the zonal or general staffs. It was expressed in a coordination of actions between more and larger units, on a large territory and for a longer time. A joint command was set up to direct the actions on an operative scale and a joint operative plan was elaborated, which provided for the part to be played by the forces of every side. The goal of the operations, the forces of the sides, the manner of action and the directions of withdrawal in case of failure were determined in advance for every joint operation. Such interaction existed between the partisan units of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, operating along the frontier between the two countries.

As we have said above, one of the goals which the Bulgarian Communist Party set itself in the struggle against fascism was to undermine the royal army, to render it unfit to fight the partisans and later to direct it against the ruling fascist clique. Great efforts, much time and a stubborn fight were needed for this. The

imperialist schemes of the nazis with respect to Bulgaria had to be exposed, the liberating nature of the partisan fight and the inevitable defeat of fascism, as well as the requisitioning of the nation's agricultural and industrial production for the needs of nazi Germany had to be elucidated.

This tremendous work was being done underground, clandestinely, secretly, from ear to ear and in strict confidence between every two persons. The just word of the Party reached the people and was forceful and convincing. In the nine months of 1942 some 382 "accidents" (sabotages) were registered in the army and many soldiers took to the mountains. While in the beginning individual soldiers escaped from the fascist barracks to the partisans, in 1943-44 whole units escaped in the same way. On December 14, 1943, a whole military unit together with its commander Lieutenant Dicho Petrov passed over to the side of the partisans. From the soldiers that had escaped from the territories occupied by the royal army, seven Bulgarian soldier partisan units were formed: the Hristo Botev Battalion, the Georgi Dimitrov Brigade, the Vassil Petleshkov, Vassil Levski, Georgi Benkovski and other detachments.

As the Soviet army came closer to Bulgaria's frontiers, the revolutionary situation in the country was coming to a head.

The victories of the Soviet army in neighbouring Rumania in August 1944 and on the other fronts radically changed the balance of power in favour of the USSR. The representatives of the bourgeoisie began to have doubts in Hitler's final success. After the death of King Boris (August 1943), the vacillations of the government became still more pronounced. The coming to power of the demagogue Bagryanov in the summer of 1944 aroused the hopes of the Anglo-Americans that Bulgaria might become their sphere of influence, but these manoeuvres could not save the bourgeoisie from disaster.

Under the hammer-blows of the Soviet army the nazi bloc began to disintegrate. The long-awaited

second front against nazi Germany was finally opened, though not out of a desire to help the USSR but in order to forestall it from liberating most of Europe.

These developments made it exceedingly urgent to immediately prepare for an uprising in Bulgaria with a view to the conquest of power. This was the fourth, concluding stage in the development of the partisan movement, the culminating point of the armed struggle; it was characterized by the coming to a head of the revolutionary crisis in the country.

As a result of the subversive work done by the Party in the army, the latter, too, underwent a serious crisis. The approach of the Soviet army, the development and activation of the partisan movement faced it with the question: with whom henceforth? With the bourgeoisie which had caused so much evil to the people or with the people who were feeding and clothing it? At that time, the regency and the government took the following decision: "The entire army, including the Reserve Officers' School and the Military School should discontinue at once all studies and join in the pursuit and destruction of the partisan movement."

Upon learning about this decision, the General Staff of the National Liberation Army immediately sent out an order to all partisan units, warning them of the impending campaign and setting them concrete tasks during the offensive.

All this accelerated the government crisis. Early in September, 1944, the reactionary bourgeoisie made one more attempt to save its skin. It dismissed Bagryanov and replaced him by Mouraviev, proposing that representatives of the Fatherland Front join the government. This proposal, however, was rejected, because it was aimed at foiling the victory of the revolutionary forces. On September 2 Mouraviev formed a government from among the leaders of the so-called "legal opposition": Moushanov, Gichev, Bourov, etc. Proclaiming its neutrality, the Mouraviev Government allowed the nazi military units to withdraw unscathed and to concentrate on our western frontier. This was prompted by the desire to forestall the entry of Soviet forces into Bul-

garia and to prepare the ground for its occupation by Anglo-American forces.

These manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie only precipitated the development of the crisis. At the end of August, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the General Staff of the National Liberation Army decided to lead the masses out into open battle for the implementation of the Fatherland Front programme. A few days later, the National Committee of the Fatherland Front informed Mouraviev that on September 5 mass meetings would be held in five of the biggest towns in Bulgaria. Mouraviev, however, banned them. This was a signal for mass strikes, meetings and demonstrations.

Two other major events took place on that day: the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria and the Politburo and General Staff of the National Liberation Army elaborated a concrete plan for an uprising. In a special statement, the Soviet Government warned the Mouraviev Government that it would no longer tolerate Bulgaria's helping nazi Germany behind the screen of pseudo-neutrality. Both this statement and the declaration of war were welcomed by the Bulgarian people, who realized that the Soviet army would enter Bulgaria as a liberator and were getting ready to give it an enthusiastic reception.

The plan of the uprising provided that the main blow should be delivered against Sofia, the nation's political centre, the seat of the government and the regency. Large partisan units were to concentrate near Sofia and in joint action with several military units — the armoured regiment, the engineering task battalion, the anti-aircraft regiment and other units — to capture the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the Police Direction, the Radio and the Central Post Office, and to arrest the members of the government and other top officials. Similar actions were to be undertaken in the other parts of the country.

The exact composition of the provisional Fatherland Front government, as well as the place where it was to be formed and start functioning had been decided upon long in advance.

The First Partisan National-Liberation Division, consisting of three brigades, was formed at the end of August near Trun (at Bulgaria's western frontier), on instructions issued by the Central Committee and the General Staff of the partisan movement. As it was situated in close proximity to the capital, it played an important part in the conquest of power. Early in September, a British military mission, headed by lieutenant-colonel Andrews, arrived secretly in Bulgaria. This mission came with a radio station and radiomen and its task was to inform its government more accurately and quickly about what was going on in Bulgaria. The Germans pretended to ignore this mission and allowed it to broadcast its information unhindered.

On September 7 an American mission arrived semi-legally in Sofia. Its task was to learn the disposition of the Bulgarian and the German forces and, of course, also of the Soviet forces.

On the following day, a second American mission, comprising seven experienced reconnaissance officers, arrived by plane. These were followed by another 15 British and as many American officers who also arrived by plane. Thus, on the eve of the uprising, there were quite a few American and British officers in Sofia, whose aim it was to forestall it.

The armed uprising was preceded by strikes and demonstrations. The miners from the Pernik mines near Sofia downed tools on September 7, 1944. In Sofia, the transport workers and most of the factory workers stopped working. Big demonstrations, accompanied by armed clashes with the police, took place in Plovdiv, Varna, Pleven and Sliven. This further intensified the antagonism between the adherents of the fascist system and the masses who were yearning for freedom.

On September 7, 1944 near the town of Trun, the soldiers of a battalion of the royal army elected a revolutionary committee, arrested the officers and established contact with the Trun Partisan Detachment. On the following day the whole battalion passed over to the side of the partisans.

On the same date, several groups of soldiers joined

the Hristo Mihailov Detachment which operated in the region of Ferdinand (now Mihailovgrad), at a moment when the detachment was about to descend from the mountains to the villages and seize power.

On September 7 and 8, the prisons in Varna, Silistra, Pleven and other towns were stormed by the working people, the prison guards came to the aid of the prisoners and helped to free them.

On September 8, a whole battalion of the 31st Infantry Regiment joined the Vassil Levski Partisan Detachment which was active along the Black Sea coast, and took part in the conquest of power.

This happened everywhere in the country, as well as in the capital.

One of the reasons for the comparatively rapid break-up of the army was the great gap that had been opened between the government and the people. The government tried to tie Bulgaria to Hitler's chariot, to turn it into his raw material appendage by placing the whole country with all its resources and riches at his disposal, while the people were against it because it meant active participation in the war on the side of nazi Germany.

The insolence of the German nazis, the fact that they had attacked the Soviet Union, and in a most treacherous way at that, without any declaration of war for the purpose of doing away with the socialist system and enslaving the Soviet peoples, exposed them and forever discredited them politically in the eyes of the Bulgarian working people.

These irreconcilable contradictions between the government and the people penetrated deep into the army.

On the other hand, the compulsory requisitioning of products for the needs of the German nazi army was deeply resented by the population. There were families that reared only one goat or one sheep; yet even these had to give a quota of milk to the state. The same applied to wheat and other products. The dissatisfaction among the people rapidly spread to the ranks of the army.

Many soldiers and officers also resented being com-

pelled, along with the police and the gendarmerie, to take part in the burning down of houses belonging to partisans and their helpers and to persecute the freedom fighters.

All this, in one form or another, affected the moral and political condition of the army. And no bourgeois orators and agitators were in a position to stop the process of demoralization and dissolution within the army.

The activity of a group of former officers, members of the Zveno Political Circle, including Kimon Georgiev, Vladimir Stoychev, Kroum Lekarski, Todor Toshev, Stoyan Trendafilov, and others, also played a certain role in the disintegration of the royal army and in its passing over to the side of the people. Having served for many years in the bourgeois army, they had taken an active part in the coup d'état of May 19, 1934, which brought to power an anti-monarchic government, headed by the leader of Zveno, Kimon Georgiev. One year later, the king and the reactionary bourgeoisie organized another coup d'état, as a result of which the power passed into the hands of people loyal to the monarchy.

The Zveno members were subjected to persecution and reprisals. Many of them underwent a political evolution and gradually passed over to anti-fascist positions. Maintaining contact with many officers in active service, they succeeded in persuading them that the war would end in favour of the Soviet Union and that the nazi army would be defeated.

The Bulgarian Communist Party extended a hand to the Zveno members who were anti-fascists, in particular to their outstanding representative Kimon Georgiev, and started working with them to save the country from the fascist dictatorship. After 1942, when on the initiative of Georgi Dimitrov the Fatherland Front was established, Kimon Georgiev joined the National Committee with a group of his adherents and after the people's victory on September 9, 1944, became the first prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Later he became Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Electrification. Today

he is a national representative and a member of the Presidium of the National Assembly.

Other Zveno members were included in the People's Army and awarded high posts as officers and generals. General Kroum Lekarski was appointed Deputy Minister of Defence, General Vladimir Stoychev Commander of the First Bulgarian Army that took part in the Patriotic War, and Generals T. Tochev and Trendafilov, commanders of the two corps that made up the First Army. Other anti-fascists were also appointed to responsible posts. Party members Captains Peter Iliev, Dimiter Popov and other regular officers also worked for the dissolution of the royal army. On the instructions of the Party, they established a "military union" and Peter Iliev joined the General Staff of the National Liberation Army. These officers took part in the September 9 Uprising in Sofia, and after the liberation were appointed to responsible posts in the People's Army.

But let us return to the developments on the eve of the Ninth of September. On September 8, the Soviet forces crossed the Rumanian-Bulgarian frontier and started liberating the towns one after the other without meeting any resistance. On the contrary, the people welcomed them with flowers as liberators.

On the same day the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Party and the General Staff of the National Liberation Army held a session at which the decision was taken to start an uprising. On September 8 at night the partisan units around Sofia, together with the military units of the regular army, as provided in the plan, captured the key institutions and points in the capital, including the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of War. The first people's democratic government was formed, which on September 9 broadcast a proclamation to the Bulgarian people, announcing the overthrow of the fascist government and the establishment of a Fatherland Front government, which would carry out the programme of the Fatherland Front.

3. CREATION OF THE BULGARIAN PEOPLE'S ARMY

Bulgaria had won freedom from fascism and capitalism. The victory was won by the revolutionary people's forces, but this victory became possible only thanks to the Soviet army, its victories and the concrete help which it rendered to the Bulgarian people.

The working people succeeded in getting rid of bourgeois and fascist oppression thanks to the fact that the Communist Party had rallied all progressive, anti-fascist forces under the banner of the Fatherland Front and the leadership of the working class, had created a strong partisan movement and won over to the revolution a substantial part of the regular royal army.

After the people's victory of September 9, 1944 the bourgeois fascist police apparatus was smashed and replaced by a people's militia, which set out to crush the resistance of the surviving fascist elements and to defend the government of the Fatherland Front.

The war for the complete rout of nazi Germany continued. A danger of aggression still existed for Bulgaria. The German forces were close to our western frontier and even made an attempt to invade the country. We needed an army to repel the impending danger, to take part in the routing of the nazi hordes and thus to wipe off the blemish which the fascists had inflicted on Bulgaria's name by having turned it into a satellite of nazi Germany. Such an army could be organized in so short a time only on the basis of the old army, with the required favourable conditions at hand.

Marxist-Leninist theory teaches us that after the revolution, the old army should be disbanded and a new one set up in its stead. The establishment of the Soviet army is a classical example of a socialist army.

But the Bulgarian People's Army was not established after the same pattern. The old bourgeois army was not dissolved. The new revolutionary army was set up in the absence of a civil war and foreign military intervention, and on the basis of the experience of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Government, and with their unstinted assistance. The Bulgarian Peo-

ple's Army came into being and was shaped up in the presence of Soviet forces in the country and in joint battles with them against the common foe.

Unlike countries like Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland, (which were occupied by nazi Germany, whose armies were defeated and their state apparatus destroyed) in Bulgaria prior to the Ninth of September the state apparatus and the army had remained intact, the Bulgarian army had not taken part in the war against the Soviet Union (had not suffered defeat as, for instance, the Rumanian Army) and had been completely preserved. What was more, the Bulgarian Army, in fulfilling tasks set to it by Hitler, had been armed with German weapons, had always been renewed with cadres loyal to the king and become consolidated. The 550,000 royal army represented a force to reckon with. To destroy such an army with far less numerous and poorly armed partisan units was an impossible task. That is why the Bulgarian Communist Party adopted the course of undermining it and of wresting it from the hands of the monarcho-fascist clique. This was facilitated by the fact that part of the officers were mobilized from the reserve and did not serve with enthusiasm, while the soldiers, sons of the people, knew what was going on in their villages and towns and were aware of the fact that the partisans defended their interests and that the royal government alone was to blame for their risking their lives in battles with the partisans.

Under the concrete setup, Bulgaria had to join without delay in the final stage of the war against Germany. There was not enough time to disband the army, dissolve its units, to mobilize its soldiers and officers anew (as happened in the Soviet Union) and to reorganize it.

Besides, during the uprising the progressive soldiers and officers had set up revolutionary committees in many military units, arresting the fascist officers, establishing contacts with the partisan detachments operating in the respective regions and joining the national-liberation forces with their units. The reactionary officers were replaced by new, progressive com-

manders. Naturally, this did not take place at once, but in the course of a longer period of time.

Again during the uprising many partisans, political prisoners, concentration camp prisoners, rebel soldiers and volunteers had joined the army, changing its political composition and nature, so that from the very first days of its existence it became a revolutionary army.

Soldiers' committees, which were revolutionary organs of the Fatherland Front in the army, were set up at the underground Party and Komsomol committees and groups. They were elected at general meetings from among the soldiers, non-coms and officers, who had proved their loyalty to the Party and the Fatherland Front. These committees had a different composition: the smallest consisted of three and the largest of 8 to 10 men. They were set up in the companies, battalions and regiments and tackled all questions connected with the life and activity of the military units. And when the decision was taken that the army should go to the front, their activity was mainly directed to its moral and political training to fight until the final defeat of the enemy.

The soldiers' committees continued to exist until the institution of the assistant-commanders was set up. Afterwards they were transformed into soldier groups of active fighters and became the first assistants of the political officers.

The assistant-commanders institution in the Bulgarian People's Army was set up by special ministerial order. Their main task was the moral and political consolidation of the army. They were the surest support of the Party and the People's Government in the army. It was through them that the Bulgarian Communist Party secured the political leadership of the armed forces. Although the ministerial order was issued on September 22, they fulfilled these functions as early as September 9, 1944.

The assistant-commanders were selected from among the partisans, political and concentration camp prisoners. They were all men with great revolutionary ex-

perience, politically mature, devoted to the cause of the working class, the Party and the Fatherland Front government. As close helpers of the commanders, they were responsible for the whole political and educational work in the units and co-operated for the fulfilment of the tasks set by the commanders.

The assistant commanders were instrumental in the moral and political mobilization of the soldiers prior to their being sent to the front, in maintaining their fighting spirit against all fascist elements who during the whole course of the Patriotic War were trying to dissolve the army and to make it unfit to fulfil its tasks. The high consciousness of the soldiers and the comparatively strict army discipline were, above all, the result of the tireless work done by the Party and the political organs set up and guided by the Party.

Another measure which helped the rapid reorganization of the army was the establishment of the guard and volunteer units immediately after the revolution.

The National Guard was formed in accordance with a Government Decree of September 11, 1944. It was composed of former partisans, political and concentration camp prisoners, soldiers who had been tested in the struggle and had revolutionary experience. Besides them, young people who had proved active participants in the anti-fascist struggle, were also admitted to the guard.

The 1st Guard Division with three infantry guard regiments, one artillery guard regiment and a guard engineering battalion were formed from the 1st Sofia National-Liberation Division. Of all 7,025 men that made up the division, 297 were partisans and 6,728 were volunteers. By November 10, its composition increased to 15,325, of whom 9,014 were volunteers. In the region of Blagoevgrad, the so-called Pirin Guard Regiment was formed, and in the region of Stanké Dimitrov, the 13th Infantry Rila Guard Regiment.

Besides the independent guard units, battalions and companies, guard units were also formed at the existing regiments and in some of the special military units. A total of 30 guard battalions, 34 guard companies

and 7 guard batteries were thus formed, and the total number of guard units came up to 74. They constituted the revolutionary nucleus of the army, lent it a popular character and with their heroism drove the soldiers into a relentless struggle against the nazis. All in all, the partisan detachments, the guard units and volunteers that joined the army amounted to 35,000.

Thus, instead of disbanding the old army and setting up an entirely new one, the Party preserved its old organizational structure, but reorganized it in the interest of the revolution and the Patriotic War, changed its functions, composition and nature and turned it from an instrument for the oppression of the people into an instrument for the oppression of the bourgeoisie and for the defence of the gains of the people. Under other conditions years might have been needed for the organization of such an army, but after Bulgaria's liberation from fascism this was achieved in an exceedingly brief period.

During the reorganization of the army, the Bulgarian Communist Party was fully aware of the fact that the old commanding staff could not be preserved and that certain commanders of units and detachments who had steeped their hands in the people's blood had to be dismissed. But to change everything at a time when the army was expected to join the war against the German nazi forces in the Balkans was impossible and inexpedient.

It was not only a question of the inevitable temporary disorganization of the work that would set in under these conditions, but it was also a question of cadres. Few were those commanders who had the training necessary to command large military units (divisions and armies), to plan their operations, to organize their supplies, and most of them had still to learn and gain experience in warfare.

Naturally the reorganization process was exceedingly complicated. Its complexity and difficulty were due to the counter-revolutionary activity of the fascist elements and the so-called opposition within the army. They tried to persuade the officers and men not to go to the front and in general not to obey the orders that were

issued. As a result, certain units and subdivisions, commanded by vacillating officers, made an attempt to return from the front, and officers who had committed crimes tried either to hide or passed over to the side of the Germans.

The vacillating and enemy elements were also egged on by the then Minister of War, Damyan Velchev, member of the Zveno Political Circle, who did everything within his power to dissolve the army and make it incapable of taking part in the war against nazi Germany. Taking advantage of the absence of the communist ministers, on November 23, 1944, he induced the government to adopt a decree which enabled officers who had perpetrated serious crimes to hide themselves and escape the wrath of the people. When they learnt about this counter-revolutionary decree, 200,000 working people from Sofia gathered at a protest meeting and demanded its immediate repeal. This incident was used as a pretext to make certain important changes in the army. The activity of the minister was curtailed. The leadership of the army was placed into the hands of the General Staff of the National-Liberation Army. The Chief of General Staff (a general from the royal army) was dismissed from office, and General Ivan Kinov, a participant in the September 1923 Uprising and a tried communist who had returned from the Soviet Union, where he had been a political emigrant, was appointed in his stead. The chief of cadres was changed as well as the chief of reconnaissance, both of them royal officers.

Deputy ministers, all communists, were appointed to assist the minister. The commander-in-chief of the forces taking part in the Patriotic War was changed. By ministerial order about 800 men from the National Liberation Army were promoted to the rank of officers in the army. Seven officers were promoted to the rank of general, 21 to the rank of colonel, 28 to the rank of lieutenant colonel and 600 to the ranks of major, captain and junior lieutenant. Many officers from the reserve were taken back into the army, especially those who had been dismissed by the fascist government for

their progressive ideas. These measures helped to stabilize the situation and guaranteed the proper development of the army.

The difficulties which beset the establishment of the Bulgarian People's Army can be seen from a statement made by Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian people.

On February 17, 1946, he told the graduating class of the Vassil Levski Military School:

"Since September 9, 1944 the army has been undergoing a process of reorganization, of transformation, of re-education in a new spirit, new ideals, new national tasks. We are going through a difficult and somewhat painful process of rebirth, of re-shaping our old army, which was commanded by fascist and foreign agents, into a people's army, with a new ideology and new ideals."

The reorganization of the army was a long process. It was not achieved by mere change in name, by formulating the new aims and purposes, by its rearmament with new weapons and technique. The new army had to have a new social and class content, which could be instilled only by men devoted to the working class, the Party and the people's government. There were plenty of such devoted men, but they had to get military training. That is why, after 1945 Fatherland Front Bulgaria started sending partisan commanders and officers, the sons of workers and peasants, who had proved their attachment and loyalty to the people's democratic government, to the Soviet military academies.

4. THE PATRIOTIC WAR

On September 10, 1944, the Fatherland Front Government declared war on nazi Germany and proceeded immediately to mobilize the nation's moral and material forces. Georgi Dimitrov raised the slogan: "Everything for the front, everything for the victory!" which became highly popular among Bulgarians.

The war was a genuine patriotic war for the Bulgarian people. First, the stain which the mercenary governments had inflicted on the Bulgarian people by having hitched Bulgaria to the nazi chariot had to be washed off and, second, the Bulgarians considered it their patriotic as well as international duty to make their contribution to the final rout of nazi Germany.

On the other hand, friendship with the Soviet Union made it incumbent on Bulgarians and their Communist Party not to leave her alone and share all hardships with her. It was necessary for Bulgaria to assume part of the heavy load weighing on the Soviet people, who were so heroically and courageously defending their land and the fate of nazi-occupied nations.

The Party, the Fatherland Front and the entire Bulgarian people felt duty-bound to take part in the war against Hitler shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet Union and its army, to start the Patriotic War and bring it to a successful conclusion.

Although not fully reorganized, the army left for the front immediately after the Ninth of September Uprising. It had been set the important task to take part with might and main in the routing of the nazi occupiers, and to make its contribution to the war against man-hating fascism, securing at the same time the nation's territorial integrity and independence.

On the eve of September 9, 1944, the German army had 26 divisions and brigades in the Balkans which were distributed into two army groups — E and F.

The E Army Group, which meant "Aegean", was composed of 13 units. Stationed in Greece and Albania, its task was to fight against the national liberation movement in these countries and not to allow any Anglo-American landings. This army consisted of about 300,000 men, plus 12,000 men of the air forces and 30,000 men of the naval forces.

The F Army Group was composed of 13 units and occupied the southern and central part of Yugoslavia. It was charged with the task of crushing the Yugoslav national-liberation movement.

Compelled by the newly arisen circumstances, the nazi command decided to withdraw the E Army Group from Greece along the valleys of the Rivers Vardar and Morava towards Niš and, together with the F Army Group, to check the advance of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. The withdrawal and regroupment of the forces had been entrusted by the nazis to the Serbian Group and the Nedich detachments.¹⁾

For the implementation of this plan, they first set themselves the task to overcome the Bulgarian forces stationed in Macedonia, which blocked their path of retreat. This meant that they were going to create a front against Bulgaria. This German plan aimed not only at saving their forces, but also, by means of several thrusts through Bulgaria's territory, to forestall the impending people's uprising there. But here again the Germans miscalculated, for by now they had obviously lost all sense of reality.

A week after the Ninth of September victory, the Bulgarian People's Army joined the 3rd Ukrainian Front under the command of Marshal Tolbukhin, and was assigned the task to advance to the west towards the valleys of the Rivers Vardar and Morava and to bar the German army's way of retreat in south-north direction. The Bulgarian army was assigned an important role in the general plan of the Soviet Command. On the basis of the task set by Marshal Tolbukhin, the High Command of the Bulgarian People's Army elaborated an operative plan providing that the main blow with the basic forces should be dealt in the general direction of Sofia-Pirot-Niš, with two auxiliary blows, the one in the direction of Kyustendil-Koumanovo-Skopje, and the other of Gorna Djoumaya (Blagoevgrad-Štip-Veles).

For the implementation of this plan, the Bulgarian army had to be regrouped and mobilized. This involved many difficulties because of the dispersion of the army: part of it was in Yugoslavia, another part in Aegean Thrace (Greece) and a third one on the Bulgaro-Turkish frontier.

¹⁾ Serbian forces who fought against Tito's partisans

Realizing the impending threat to their forces as a result of Bulgaria's entry into the war, the nazis hastened to deal a blow to the First Occupation Corps which was in Serbia. Taking advantage of the betrayal of several royal officers, they captured its staff and the staffs of the three divisions of which it was made up. A few other units were also captured and disarmed. Only one division withdrew without losing its fighting ability. The others had been rendered unfit to fight.

The withdrawal of the army from Macedonia was in jeopardy, for the forces on the Bulgaro-Turkish frontier had to be kept in their positions, as no one could tell what Turkey might do. The forces in Greece also remained where they were.

While the forces from Yugoslavia were being withdrawn, a rapid mobilization was effected in Bulgaria. By September 18, seven infantry divisions, one cavalry division, one cavalry brigade, one armoured brigade, army and special units were mobilized, and by October 3, another four infantry divisions were mobilized.

Thanks to the people's enthusiasm at their liberation from fascism, the mobilization was carried out promptly and without delay.

The Bulgarian People's Army fought the first battles on the frontier, to prevent the nazis from invading the country and to cover up the concentration of the mobilized forces and units. These battles were defensive. Here and there the Germans succeeded in penetrating Bulgarian soil, but thanks to the heroism of the soldiers, partisans and volunteers, the danger was liquidated and the three armies comprising a total of 350,000 men, intended to join the 3rd Ukrainian Front, were ready for decisive military operations.

Thus began the first stage of the Patriotic War of the Bulgarian people. The three armies were assigned concrete tasks by Marshal Tolbukhin, Commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front.

To attain the goals set to it during the first stage of the Patriotic War, the Bulgarian People's Army

conducted a number of operations: at Niš, at Stralsin-Koumanovo, at Bregalnitsa-Stroumitsa and at Kossovo. In all operations, active tasks were assigned to the forces: to rout the main forces of the enemy, to surround and annihilate them. As a result of these operations, the first stage of the Patriotic War ended in complete success. The young Bulgarian army held for almost two months substantial nazi forces at bay in the Balkans, inflicting serious losses on them. A total of 32 tanks, 72 tugs, 35 locomotives, 3,200 lorries, 20 airplanes, 277 guns, 100 mine-throwers and other arms and materials fell into Bulgarian hands. Moreover, as the roads for withdrawal to the north were cut off and blocked, a nazi army of 40,000 men stationed in Greece and on the Aegean islands was forced to surrender.

These victories were of great political importance for Bulgaria. Its international status was consolidated, for these operations showed that the Bulgarian people had nothing in common with their former venal fascist governments and that they had never supported the policy pursued by them.

These operations were Bulgaria's first capital in its foreign policy, earning it international prestige among the progressive world and especially in the Soviet Union, in co-operation with whose army Bulgaria reaped its first successes. Although quite young and newly established, the Bulgarian People's Army fulfilled its international duty by making its contribution to the liberation of Yugoslavia.

The successfully concluded operations during the first stage of the Patriotic War had also important domestic consequences. Our people became convinced that only the Fatherland Front Government, headed by the Communist Party, would be able to rehabilitate Bulgaria and ensure it a worthy and just peace.

The first period of the Patriotic War was also of great military significance. The Bulgarian People's Army succeeded in fulfilling an important military task, making its contribution to the routing of a sizeable nazi force and manifesting high moral and fighting

qualities. It secured the left flank of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which advanced westward along the course of the River Danube.

The victories gained by the Bulgarian People's Army at Niš, Kriva Palanka, Stratsin, Koumanovo, Štip, Veles, Skopje, Poduevo and Prishtina showed what an army is capable of achieving when it defends the interests of the working class and has clearly set progressive tasks. These victories raised the morale of the soldiers and officers and imbued them with faith in the complete victory over the enemy.

At the beginning of 1945 the military and political situation was exceedingly unfavourable to nazi Germany, which was no longer able to replace the losses sustained in men and war material. The countries it had occupied and which served as sources of strategic raw materials were being liberated. Its military potential was rapidly waning. Despite several strong counter-blows which were implemented by the nazi command for the purpose of checking the advance of the Soviet army, the latter continued to advance at a rapid pace and nothing was in a position to check its triumphant march. The Bulgarian army acted in concord with it. The attempts of the American and British imperialists and their stooges in Bulgaria to frustrate Bulgaria's participation in the war and thus to weaken Bulgaria's international position failed. The Bulgarian people were firmly resolved to take part in the final rout of nazi Germany and no one was in a position to deflect them from the fulfilment of this decision.

In mid-November 1944, the Soviet Government authorized Bulgaria to take part in the further military operations. An army comprising six infantry divisions and army units and numbering 130,000 officers and men was quickly formed and called the First Bulgarian Army, under the command of Lieutenant-General Vladimir Stoychev.

Towards November 20, the First Bulgarian Army began to concentrate in Yugoslavia, about 70 km north of Belgrade, on the right bank of the River Danube.

After its concentration, it had first to replace Yugoslav and Soviet units and then to go over to an offensive. The Germans had taken advantageous positions, turning them into strong fortified points, defended by about 18 battalions from different divisions.

After nearly two weeks of fighting in the region between the rivers Sava and Drava, the First Bulgarian Army got the order to advance towards Hungary. At first the Army fought defensive battles and then, together with the Soviet army, passed over to an offensive.

After long and bitter fighting, on May 7, the First Bulgarian Army began to pursue the enemy. It fulfilled the task set to it by advancing more than 200 km, crossing the Austro-Yugoslav frontier and reaching the Alps. It thus secured the southern flank of the 3rd Ukrainian Front and the general southern strategic flank of the Soviet forces which were advancing westward. The joint war operations of the Bulgarian and Soviet armies and the blood shed in common helped still further to consolidate the friendship between soldiers and commanders of the two armies.

As a result of these battles, the First Bulgarian Army liberated a substantial portion of Yugoslav territory, which had been occupied by the Germans, and large quantities of war material fell into Bulgarian hands.

While during the first stage the Bulgarian People's Army helped to liberate Yugoslavia, during the second stage it helped to liberate Hungary. The Hungarian people, like the peoples of Yugoslavia, welcomed the Bulgarian Army with warm and sincere feelings, because the soldiers treated them as their brothers. They not only fought but also helped the Hungarians to plough their fields, to sow them and to rebuild their destroyed homes. It was thus that the fraternal friendship between the Bulgarian fighters and the Hungarian working people was established.

The victories won during the two stages of the war were only made possible as a result of the joint efforts at the front and in the rear of the entire Bulgarian

people. Bulgarian casualties amounted to 31,910 killed, wounded and missing, and military expenditures to over 133,000 million leva (according to 1945 currency).

But the Bulgarian army inflicted great losses on the enemy: more than 60,000 killed, captured and wounded, capturing 46 tanks, 21 planes, 405 guns, 340 mine-throwers, 3,724 lorries, 1,984 machine-guns, many rifles, locomotives, cars, ammunition and other war materials.

The young People's Army defended with honour the name of the Bulgarian people, and won a worthy place for them among the peaceful nations. Through its participation in the liberation of Yugoslavia and Hungary, it fulfilled its highest international duty. Its victories showed to the whole world that a people liberated from fascism was capable of performing great deeds.

The victories of the Bulgarian army during the Patriotic War will remain in the annals as heroic pages, filled with courage, steadfastness and love for freedom.

When speaking of the heroic deeds of our young army, we should not fail to mention that its courage, selflessness, patriotism and internationalism stemmed, above all, from the just cause of the war, which it waged shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet army. The soldiers and commanders of the Bulgarian People's Army fought and bravely met the bayonets of the enemy with their chests, because they knew that they were fighting for the people and for their freedom.

Great credit for the victories of the Bulgarian People's Army is due to the fraternal assistance of the Soviet army. This assistance was both moral and material. Soviet instructors, experienced officers and generals, were present at the Army's High Command and General Staff. It was the duty of these instructors to render assistance not only in organizing the military operations, but also in the training of the men, the transport of the army, in securing material and technical supplies for the staffs, departments and services.

The countless examples of heroism and selflessness, displayed by the Soviet soldiers, were a source of in-

spiration for the Bulgarian soldiers and commanders to defend their liberated country in the same way and not to spare their life for its future.

The victories of the Bulgarian People's Army were extolled in three orders of gratitude of the Soviet High Command and on three occasions the capital of the Soviet Union, Moscow, gave salutes in its honour.

Some 360 Bulgarian soldiers and officers were awarded Soviet orders for their heroism, and the chests of 120,000 fighters were decorated with medals.

The Bulgarian Communist Party played a major role in the victorious conclusion of the war and in the worthily fulfilled international duty by the Bulgarian People's Army. This role consisted in the first place in the resolve of the Party to set up the Bulgarian People's Army, to get it consolidated, to assign it its tasks, properly to educate it and to inspire it with faith in the final victory. It also consisted in the Party's solicitude to provide the army with everything that it needed, by mobilizing the whole rear in the interest of the successful conclusion of the war. At the call of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the people mobilized all their moral and material resources and forces. "Everything for the front, everything for victory!" was the rallying and mobilizing slogan. And indeed, everything was done in the interest of the army, and in the interest of victory. To make this possible, the Bulgarian Communist Party rallied all the working people under the banner of the Fatherland Front and laid down the political line that was to be followed. It sent its best cadres to the army — former partisans, political and concentration camp prisoners, communists tested in bloody battles with the enemy, men who did not spare their lives when it was a question of the Party and country.

At the same time, the Communist Party opened a front against the internal enemies. Enemies were those who under fascism had helped the nazis, who had persecuted progressive people for their convictions and had stained their hands with the people's blood. These fascist elements were now engaging in sabotage, is-

suing newspapers and leaflets, entering into contact with the imperialist centres outside the country, making use of their radio stations to slander the socialist system, trying to sap the army and hence the people's government. Their propaganda was directed mainly against Bulgaria's participation in the war against nazi Germany. The fascist elements tried to frighten people by asserting that the casualties would be very great and unjustified and that the communists would soon have to go.

The whole opposition was involved in this propaganda. It was headed at that time by Georgi M. Dimitrov (Gemeto, who later escaped from the country), traitor to the Fatherland Front and to his country.

As a result of this propaganda, vacillations and confusion appeared among part of the officers and men in certain military units and appeals were raised among the soldiers to go back home.

The propaganda against Bulgaria's participation in the war against the nazis was also accompanied by acts of sabotage. A number of factory owners either did not produce anything or turned out a very small and low-quality output. Some merchants concealed goods in short supply, raised the prices at will and spread a psychosis that everything was going to disappear gradually from the market and that starvation would set in.

Enemy propaganda was concentrated against the Bulgarian Communist Party and its leaders. The enemy knew perfectly well who had fought the hardest, who had sustained the greatest losses in the fight for people's rule and who was going to defend it with might and main. And in those days the main task was precisely to defend and consolidate the people's rule and to retain it. This made it necessary to take prompt and decisive measures, to carry out several serious undertakings in order to consolidate the government and to prevent a comeback of fascism and capitalism.

On October 3, 1944 a Law on the People's Court was issued for the purpose, under which the fascist criminals were brought to trial.

On October 20, the Council of Ministers issued a decree, which authorized the Fatherland Front committees to exercise control over the state authorities. Later on, the government floated a loan, appealing to the people to subscribe to it, to meet the new government's financial needs. An appeal was made to render all-out assistance to the front. According to incomplete data, the young people guided by the Young Workers' League alone collected more than 200 millions leva and more than 1.250,000 kg of products. More than 250,000 parcels with foodstuffs and gifts were sent to the front.

"For the first time in its history, our army is the object of genuine people's gratitude and boundless people's love," Georgi Dimitrov wrote at that time.

A Front Week was organized under the leadership of the Party, during which money, clothing and products were collected for the front.

Great attention was devoted to the soldiers' families. The Party and Komsomol organizations as well as the Fatherland Front committees supplied them with fuel, helped them in their farm work, carried out repairs in their houses.

All-round care was devoted to the wounded. New hospitals were opened and optimum conditions were created for their treatment and prompt recovery. Thousands of women and girls visited the wounded every day, brought them gifts and helped them in their treatment.

All this exerted a tremendous influence on the morale of the fighters and of the whole army.

"You don't expect us to spare our lives at this moment, when the nations of the world have raised their iron fist to deal a final blow to the German monster," the soldiers of a unit wrote to the pupils in Vassilevo village, General Toshev district.

The Bulgarian Communist Party thus strove day after day to organize the army of our people's democratic state and to make it fit to fight the enemy.

The Patriotic War ended in the complete and unconditional surrender of nazi Germany. The banners of

the Bulgarian People's Army were covered with glory. It fulfilled its patriotic and international duty with honour. What remained for it now was to be rearmed and develop as a modern army.

5. THE BULGARIAN PEOPLE'S ARMY TODAY

Long before the war, Bulgaria had been tied to the chariot of nazi Germany. The doctrine of the royal army had been German, its armament German and its military organization had also been patterned after the German one. The programmes according to which its men and officers were trained, both in the military establishments and in the barracks, had been copies of the German programmes. The officers had studied the German experience of war.

A positive feature was that the Bulgarian army was not a caste army. The body of its officers came from all strata of the population. It was not rare for progressive-minded sons of workers and peasants to enter the military schools and the military academy. All this, as well as the fact that it had old connexions with the Russian army, facilitated the Bulgarian Communist Party to organize the new People's Army.

The first steps which had to be made were to rearm the army, to cast out the old German arms and replace them with new, Soviet weapons. But this could not be done before and during the Patriotic War, and that is why the army fought with its old weapons, those that had been supplied by Germany. After the end of the war, however, one of the first concerns of the Party was to rearm the army and introduce harmony among the different kinds of armed forces. The air force, for instance, had too many soldiers and very few planes of different types. Moreover, many of these planes were in poor condition and quite outdated.

Quite insufficient and very outdated were also the tanks. There was a great disproportion between infantry and technology. The tanks were concentrated in individual tank units. There were no tanks in the

different units, and the latter were insufficient either as immediate support to the infantry or for the fulfilment of tasks in the depth of the anti-tank defence.

The army was also poorly motorized, and its motorization did not correspond to its great numbers. That is why the infantry divisions were clumsy and not manoeuvrable. The artillery and mine-throwers in the units and subdivisions were also inadequate. With the available artillery and mine-throwers, the divisions and armies were not in a position to organize the necessary compactness on 1 km of the front in case of a breakthrough of the enemy's defence.

Neither was the anti-aircraft defence well organized. The infantry arms were of different makes and trade marks and the automatic and machine guns were quite insufficient. The situation in the fleet and in the supporting forces was similar.

The high command had very limited reserves at its disposal. With these reserves it was not in a position to exercise substantial influence on the course of military operations.

All these shortcomings in the armament of the Bulgarian People's Army would have led to dire consequences in the Patriotic War if it had not been a component part of the 3rd Ukrainian Front and if the latter had not supported it with its artillery and aviation.

Even during the war, the Soviet Government gave the Bulgarian army arms and machines free of charge, not to mention the fact that the captured material was left entirely at our disposal.

After the end of the military operations, the Fatherland Front Government began gradually to rearm the army with Soviet weapons and technology. Today all its weapons and technology are Soviet and of the latest models.

In its organization and training the Bulgarian People's Army is guided by Soviet military doctrine. The forces are trained according to programmes and regulations in which the experience of the Soviet army is widely reflected. All this, of course, is adapted to local conditions, to our terrain and climate. There is

full harmony now between the different kinds of forces, which are adequately supplied with artillery, mine-throwers and tanks; the air force, as well as the anti-aircraft defence, are properly developed. The subdivisions and units are mechanized and possess high mobility. The success of a military operation is entrusted to all types of forces, which subordinate their efforts to the common task and goal.

Coordination in all operations from top to bottom is a guiding principle in organizing modern fighting and operations.

Great initiative and creative work is entrusted to the officers and generals of the Bulgarian army, and those who are capable are offered ample opportunities for advancement.

The Bulgarian People's Army is well-trained for defensive purposes, but when necessary it can also perform offensive operations in great depth and at high speed.

Parallel with the rearmament of the Bulgarian People's Army, the training of cadres was also started. As early as 1945 partisans and officers of the former royal army who had proved loyal to the people's rule were sent to study in Soviet military academies. According to an agreement between the Bulgarian and Soviet Governments, instructors were sent to the Bulgarian army. The first Soviet Statutes were also translated. From the very start, the Bulgarian People's Army was organized after the Soviet pattern. Its training, education and course of study were patterned after those of the Soviet armed forces.

Many measures are taken to consolidate relations between the two armies. Most effective are the joint drills, in which Bulgarian soldiers and officers act shoulder to shoulder with Soviet soldiers and officers.

Rallies, drills and conferences are organized to unify the views regarding the training of the officers' body. The Soviet people readily share their experience and help the Bulgarians in mastering the new technique.

Such joint measures are also implemented with

the other armies of the Warsaw Pact countries. The results are excellent both as regards the unification of views between our armies on the training and utilization of armed forces and the reinforcement of friendship between our two armies.

Today all officers, from the minister down to the platoon commander, are graduates of one or two Soviet military academies. All commanders of military units are graduates of the Bulgarian Military Academy. Many of the battalion commanders are also academy graduates. This high qualification of the commanding staff secures a corresponding training of the whole army. And, indeed, the Bulgarian People's Army is well trained, well armed and drilled. It is a modern army. The people's government spares no effort and funds for its armament.

Leading personalities in the Party and state often hold conferences with the officers, at which they acquaint themselves with their problems and take measures to resolve those which the Ministry of Defence is unable to solve.

A special body, known as the General Political Administration at the Central Committee, is in charge of the Party's political guidance of the army. It has the rank of a department at the Central Committee and has its organs in all army units. It looks after the political and moral condition of the forces and their discipline.

The Party and the Komsomol are the only organizations represented in the army. The latter is thus united around the Central Committee and the Government. The Party and Komsomol organizations do not interfere with the professional work of the commanders, but help them by securing through Party channels the best fulfilment of the tasks set by them.

The Party and Komsomol members serve as models of conduct. They are always at the most difficult jobs, fulfil their obligations best, maintain the machines and weapons in the best condition and are the most disciplined. Almost all young men are members of the Komsomol, which is the largest youth organization.

It is entrusted with cultural initiatives, sports, competitions, etc. The Party and Komsomol organizations play an important role in the everyday life of the units, in particular during military drills, and whenever the units are faced with great hardships and trying experiences. Before the military exercises and drills, the Communists and Komsomol members hold meetings at which they explain the character of the exercises and drills and the difficulties likely to arise and on this basis, mobilize their forces.

The army is a veritable school for the training and education of the young.

The young recruits, called up to fulfil their patriotic duty, become not only physically steeled. They get also a good political training. They are taught to become good patriots in the Komsomol organizations, during classes, through visits to plants, co-operative farms and historic sites. In the barracks the young men grow to maturity, become men, and acquire many work habits which they need in their civil life. Many young men learn a profession in the barracks. Some go out as fully-fledged chauffeurs, others as wireless or telephone operators, fitters, while the officers graduating from military schools become specialists for whom there is always employment if they have to leave the army before being pensioned.

In the educational work, great stress is laid on friendship, attachment to the commander, to the Party and people. The rich revolutionary traditions of the Bulgarian Communist Party and people are used to educate the soldiers in a spirit of patriotism and internationalism. Their education is also helped by the soldiers' clubs and the so-called military glory rooms, in which they are familiarized with what the army defends by means of models, diagrams and panels.

Particular attention is devoted in the army to the training of the body of soldiers and officers. They are trained under conditions approximating those in war-time. With every passing year the number of excellent students in the art of war and Marxism-Leninism is increasing. The number of excellent units and subdi-

visions is also increasing. Shooting exercises with different weapons are as a rule good and excellent. Good and excellent is also the condition of the guns and weapons. The Bulgarian soldier is attached to his weapons and always keeps them in good condition.

Great attention is also devoted to the fighting trim of the forces, thanks to which they can go into battle at short notice and without being taken by surprise.

We can judge about the good training of the Bulgarian People's Army both from the evaluation of the Minister of National Defence of the People's Republic of Bulgaria and from the assessment of the Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact countries and of our Party and state leaders.

Large-scale exercises were carried out in the last few years, in which the Bulgarian People's Army took part on an equal footing with the Soviet Army and the armies of the other Warsaw Pact countries. These exercises are performed with a view to elaborating questions of the administration, interaction, landing of maritime and air-borne forces, overcoming of water barriers. In all exercises, the Bulgarian People's Army has demonstrated good organization, stamina and great mobility, and has been highly assessed.

In 1967 large manoeuvres were carried out on Bulgarian soil under the name of "Rhodope". Subdivisions and units of the Bulgarian People's Army took part in it. This is what the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov, the Minister of National Defence, Dobri Djourov, who was in charge of the exercises, and the Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the Warsaw Pact countries, Marshal Yakubovsky, said in this connexion:

"The Rhodope manoeuvres," Todor Zhivkov said, "once again confirm that the Bulgarian People's Army is a reliable shield of our people's freedom, independence and socialist gains. They come to show us visually that our country and our army have loyal allies in the Warsaw Pact countries and their armed forces, that our fraternal forces have a united com-

mand capable of coordinating and directing their forces and to deal a heavy blow with the iron fist of our common military might to any enemy, from wherever he might come.”¹⁾

Marshal Yakubovsky spoke in much the same vein: “The manoeuvres displayed in full measure the increased field preparation of the forces, their ability to fight by applying all kinds of new weapons and modern technique.

“It can be said with full justification that these manoeuvres enriched our experience in our readiness to fight and made a substantial contribution to the fighting preparedness of the armies of the Warsaw Pact countries.”²⁾

And this is what the Minister of Defence, Army General Dobri Djourov, said in connexion with the manoeuvres:

“The tremendous potentialities demonstrated by the modern models of aviation, naval, armoured tank and artillery technique, as well as the precise and unfailing operations of all other kinds of arms and technique, aroused great admiration.

“The manoeuvres showed the increased ability of commanders and staffs to organize and direct the operations of their forces in all conditions and in any setup. In this connexion, we should specially point out the close interaction achieved between the subdivisions and units of the different national armies as well as between the different types of armed forces.”

“The operations of the forces in the landing of naval and air forces, in breaking through the defence and in repelling enemy blows revealed great precision, which is a proof of a resolute, constant and high operative direction of the subdivisions and units on the part of the commanders and staffs and of the

¹⁾ Rabotnichesko Delo, No 240, August 28, 1967

²⁾ Ibid.

high fighting capacity and field training of the forces.”¹⁾

About the quality of the training of the Bulgarian People's Army we can also judge from the statements of certain military experts of the capitalist countries. Thus, for instance, in April 1967 the Turkish journalist Yilmaz Cetinar wrote in the *Cumhuriyet*: “The Bulgarians on the whole have well-trained, well-armed and brave soldiers. The Bulgarians are a courageous nation.”

The Bulgarian People's Army is part of the army of the Warsaw Pact. This military alliance is quite defensive in character. It was set up after the USA, Great Britain and other imperialist states established the NATO aggressive bloc as a threat against the Soviet Union and the other socialist states. Solicitous about their collective security, each one of the Warsaw Pact countries places its army in the hands of an allied command for the defence of socialism against imperialism.

In taking part in the Warsaw Pact, the Bulgarian People's Army assumed great obligations, arising from the obligations contained in the bilateral agreements for mutual assistance between the individual socialist states. These provide that if one socialist state is threatened with aggression (or counter-revolution — author's note), the other country is bound to render it every kind of assistance. On this ground the Bulgarian People's Army, together with the armies of the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and the German Democratic Republic, rendered military assistance to fraternal Czechoslovakia by sending armed forces to check the counter-revolution which threatened its socialist system. Bulgaria and the Bulgarian People's Army fulfilled their international duty.

The hue and cry of the imperialist centres on this occasion is an eloquent proof of the correctness of our action. They are weeping not for the freedom of the

¹⁾ Rabotnichesko Delo, No 240, August 28, 1967

Czechoslovak people, for it is precisely our armies that guarantee this freedom. They are weeping and sorry for something on which they banked and which misfired.

The Bulgarian People's Army is part of the Bulgarian nation, its dearest offspring. Under capitalism, the army did not enjoy a good name among the people. Both at the time of the September 1923 Uprising and at the time of the partisan struggle in the period of 1941-44, the army was used against the people, to crush the partisan movement, a product of the people. The royal army thus earned the hatred of the workers and peasants, and service in it was considered not as fulfilment of one's patriotic duty, but as an unpleasant chore. People with a progressive outlook were not allowed to enter its ranks and for every progressive manifestation there were severe penalties, even capital punishment.

Prior to September 9, 1944, the sons of well-to-do parents, who had proved their loyalty to the fascist government, stood the best chances of entering the military educational establishments. The candidates were exceedingly few in number. At present the number of candidates for military schools is very large. There are 5 to 10 candidates for every available place in the different special military fields, and this makes it possible to make a most careful selection of the candidates. The young men enter the barracks with enthusiasm. Veritable celebrations are organized to see off the young recruits. Relatives, friends and comrades flock to the home of the young recruit, heaping presents upon him and giving him instructions as to how to become the best soldier. The young men go singing to the barracks.

Great celebrations take place in the barracks on the days when the young soldiers take the oath. Distance is no hindrance for the soldier's near and dear ones to come and attend this important act in the life of the young men.

Every year, the army lends a helping hand to our farmers. According to the plan of the Ministry of

National Defence, a period is set aside every year for gathering in the crops. At that time the soldiers and their commanders are among the co-operative farmers, among those whom they defend. On the one hand, this helps to reinforce the links between the army and the people and, on the other, it maintains the work habits among the soldiers.

1968 was a year of drought. The drought set in already in the spring when the tobacco was transplanted. This made it necessary to water the tobacco. For the purpose thousands of soldiers and officers were sent to lend a hand to the farmers. They came with water tanks, automatic machines, pumps and other machinery that was needed to save the tobacco crop.

Assistance is also rendered to the farms in autumn when several crops, including maize, sunflower and fruit, grow ripe.

In cases of natural calamities, the army hastens to the aid of agriculture. When the ice thaws in spring, the rivers often get clogged up with ice, the water floods the banks and causes serious trouble. When the weather is very hot, fires break out. On such occasions, the army leaves its garrisons and goes to combat the natural calamities. Several years ago the wall of a big dam burst. The water, mixed with mud, flooded a whole village. Its inhabitants were threatened with death. But our helicopter fliers arrived quickly on the spot, and at the risk of their life, saved the women, men and children that were threatened with death.

But "love for love, friendship for friendship" says a Bulgarian proverb. Just as the soldiers respond to the needs of the population, so also does the population respond when military units lack something. All are ready to assist the army: factories, state and co-operative farms, Party and state bodies. Many enterprises and co-operative farms take some military units under their patronage and sign an agreement for mutual assistance.

The soldiers are among the workers and peasants

not only on holidays and celebrations, but also in their work.

It is very edifying and touching that the military units have their patrons. Their patron is usually a revolutionary who gave his life for the country's independence and freedom. In the soldiers' dormitory there is a bed for him, surrounded by a red or green cord and the name of the hero stands on a plate, being called at the roll call every night.

The soldiers also look after the graves and common graves of patriots who gave their life in the fight against fascism.

Many are the forms in which contacts are maintained between the army and the people, as well as between the Party and the army. The army attaches high value and keeps alive the revolutionary traditions of the Party and the people. And the Party devotes great attention to the maintenance of the moral and political unity between army and people, which is a sure pledge for every victory.

As an army of a socialist type, the Bulgarian People's Army is distinguished by high discipline. This is due not only to the oath, which obliges the soldiers to be obedient, but also to the tremendous political and educational work done in the army. Not only the commander, but also the Party and Komsomol organizations watch over the conduct of an officer, sergeant and soldier. Not only the commander but also the Party and Komsomol organization put forward demands in case of violations.

This unity of action between commander and Party and Komsomol organizations helps to tighten the discipline and hence, raises the fighting readiness and capacity of the armed forces.

Great attention is paid in the Bulgarian People's Army to physical education. It is practised not only in the hours set aside for it in the programmes, but also in those set aside for sport and work among the masses. The army takes part in all physical education events in the country: relay races, sports games, competitions in all kinds of sport. Good

football, volleyball and chess players, wrestlers and other sportsmen are trained in the army.

The Bulgarian People's Army has ample facilities for physical education and sports, which are aimed at training physically steeled soldiers. This can be seen in the long and strenuous marches and drills as well as in the everyday life of the subdivisions and units.

The Bulgarian People's Army also engages in broad cultural activities. There are amateur groups in all subdivisions and units. In some garrisons there are song groups, in other garrisons dance or mixed companies. Brass bands have been organized in many units.

The Bulgarian soldier likes to make merry. He is fond of folk songs, especially of those that sprang up when Bulgaria was under Ottoman rule and during the fight against fascism and capitalism. The Bulgarian soldiers enjoy listening to and singing songs in which the labour of our co-operative farmers and the achievements of our flyers and frontier guards are extolled. At the end of every year, the amateur art groups take part in a competition. It is a real competition to give the best performance to soldiers from other garrisons as well as to the population.

The Army Theatre and the Army Ensemble are doing a lot of educational work in the army. The plays and songs which they perform are on military subjects and profoundly patriotic in character. It is a great joy for the soldiers to attend performances of our best actors, singers and musicians.

Army Day, September 23, is one of the most solemnly celebrated holidays in Bulgaria. In town and country, in all garrisons, large and small, the people rally for the celebration of this holiday. The families of servicemen, their relatives, representatives of public organizations, the Party, the Komsomol, factories and co-operative farms attend these celebrations. The soldiers and commanders are publicly extolled and the people's attachment to the army

finds expression in the most beautiful words. And these words are obliging, and the attachment thus expressed gives rise to a similar attachment on the part of the soldiers and officers.

The Bulgarian People's Army has the function to defend the peaceful labour of the people, their gains, and the frontiers of the country. It has all that may be necessary for the purpose at its disposal. But if anyone should venture to attack us, he will also come up against the armed forces of our loyal allies.

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